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Yup, issue 2. So jam packed we have hardly any space for an editorial! We hope you like our little homage to the Galaxy's Greatest Comic 100th Issue on our cover. 40 years - where did it go...

As we went to press the Royal Mail announced their Marvel at 80 stamps designed by Alan Davis. With our feature on Captain Britain this issue it's like we planned it (we didn't - honestly). This issue also has 80 pages, so we can fit in a little experiment with some comic strips for you. It's a Corker! and introduces new writer Lew 'Bilimey Blog' Stringer and a preview of Apollo creators new comic 'Our Land'.

There is a lot more inside for you to enjoy so with that I bid adieu.

Your's aye, Tony

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COMIC CON FANS ANONYMOUS

Hello, my name is Leonard and I attend comic conventions. Boy, that feels good to get off my chest!

Okay, comparing being an avid member of pop culture fandom and being an addict, having to face serious demons, may seem a little vacious at first glance, but there are a number of parallels between the two which spring to mind. You get regularly asked by those unfamiliar with how the meetings go if you attend them incognito, hiding behind a costume or a persona. The person on the street might not quite understand the appeal, doesn't get why it costs so much, doesn't fathom why somebody would spend an extortionate amount of time and money to 'get their fix', when it could be easier to 'just walk away'. You can quit at any time, right?

And most of all, your support comes in number. I often feel disconnected with the world until I find myself in the warm bosom of my fellow 'addicts', my like-minded compatriots, my tribe. My family. It's a heady brew and an addiction all of its own.

I'll take off the name badge and come clean: my name is Leonard Sultana, I've been a comics / science-fiction / genre fan since, well, forever, with images of copies of The Beano and Eagle strewn over the living room floor in front of the fire being some of my earliest memories. I got into convention fandom quite late but I've caught up as best I could, going from attending shows here in the UK, to attending the big show in San Diego, to participating in fan groups about San Diego Comic Con, to being a guest and panel hosting at San Diego Comic Con, to setting up websites and podcasts about convention fandom and, more recently, panel hosting on a professional basis at numerous conventions here in the UK. Safe to say, being a fan has kept me busy.

In covering comic cons, I have gained a little perspective in what makes them tick, along with why they're so popular - and why they're currently at a bit of a precipice. Fandom has always has a monetary element, no one can be naive enough to think that these shows are put on, purely for the good of everybody's health. However, over the past decade and a half, with the advent of online groups and rampant social media, fans have learnt the power they have over the properties they support and the fandoms they are a part of. Comic cons have evolved from being a location where people can celebrate the people that create the things they love, they have now become a place for people to celebrate themselves.

This self-actualised power has manifested itself in the movement of geek culture from the marginals to the mainstream, with film, television, music, gaming, all elements of pop culture being driven by those that were once dismissed and ridiculed. We have celebrated a time where the nerds have indeed inherited the Earth - and the mainstream has profited nicely from that time. But now the fear is that it's all become a bit too much, with so many conventions and shows rising to meet that demand, that the whole thing could fall in on itself.

There's not a weekend goes by when there's not one show, three shows, ten shows, all vying for the attention (and the wallets) of fans. And, as such, we have seen in recent years big shows, shows that you would have seen going great guns in years past, struggling to get numbers through the doors or even folding completely under the weight of the burgeoning convention calendar. As the threat of the bubble bursting looms, it has felt that some - unscrupulous convention organisers, greedy special guests, etc. - are making the most of the opportunity and grabbing what they can before the iceberg is struck and the ship sinks completely.

But here's the thing. I, along with a a great number of writers and commentators, feel that these shows are not at a risk of imploding on themselves, they are merely in a state of flux. Fans are attending a higher and higher quality of convention in recent years, feeding us with slicker presentations, more and varied attractions and guests and, yes, opportunities for fans to come together and celebrate their collective passions. So long as we claim the power we have as fans as a collective - and so long as convention organisers remember that opening the doors simply isn't enough in today's market - shows will continue to thrive and grow. It's time for us to stop being anonymous.

Interview JAIME MILNER Wales Comic Con

Jaime Milner is the creator and curator of the hugely successful Wales Comic Con, now in its 11th year in 2019. The show has now become a bi-annual affair, grown into becoming one of the UK's premier pop culture celebrations, drawing guests and fans from across the globe. The next event takes place on 27-28th April 2019: for more info, head to www.walescomiccon.con

You've been doing this a while now, with increasing degrees of success - what do you feel is the hallmark of a successful and popular comic convention, here in the UK?

Evolution. You have to find the will to constantly change and evolve your events otherwise there is nothing that will differentiate you from the hordes of other events taking place up and down the country right now. Whether that means making small or big changes ultimately the organiser will decide but it simply has to be done and I believe the best events are those who look to adapt and move with the market. Pop culture is ever changing and these events must change with them.

Attendee feedback and interaction is the most important element of a comic convention, I feel - what have been the most frequent responses you've been getting back from your attendees? What have you been hearing on the grapevine?

Almost always it will revolve around the venue – We have been hosting the event at Glyndwr University in Wrexham for 10 years now, it has essentially become "home" for us, and for the most part everyone enjoys it. Yes it is different to what most will use as a venue (such as an arena) but we have utilised it the best we can and keep working with the layout to accommodate growth each and every time. Our most recent event saw us increase our floor space dramatically by bringing in three industrial marquees where we added; flooring, heating, lighting and drapes to house a whole host of

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new vendors. Not only did this give us much needed room for movement but also brought a new breath of fresh life as we added almost double the vendors we have previously added at any event.

I've been to a number of conventions in recent years where the idea of a comic con simply hasn't stuck, simply due to where it's been held. Can a convention rise and fall by the simple fact of being held in certain areas of the country? Is it all 'location, location, location'?

I truly believe out of all of the events that blossomed in the UK convention "boom" we proved that you certainly can build an event away from the big cities and people will attend. But do not think it is as simple as setting one up and masses will arrive, it has taken us ten years to get where we are today with each show providing us with something new to learn, something to react to and of course providing us with new ways to evolve because in this industry you really have to constantly be adding to your event in terms of what you can offer the attendees and ask yourself – what makes you different? Why should anyone attend your event over others? Only each individual organiser can answer them honestly of course but I truly believe where we hold our own event also adds something different for attendees.

The bigger the convention landscape gets, the more the need for slicker presentations, more prestige venues, more content, more panels, more international guests, more more more... How demanding have the convention going audience become in recent years? And how difficult does that make it for you to deliver?

For me the best part is always announcing something or someone new to the event – I love it when someone is so happy because of something you have created. Are we not all demanding as humans from time to time? In terms of bringing in bigger content, larger guests etc that is purely down to the mind-set and business plans of those around you in the industry and where they want to take their own respective events. Above all else though the overseas markets will dominate the headlines with guests purely because of where the vast majority are based making travel and scheduling much easier. Prestige is all down to presentation – Your image is key.

Prices for certain guests and their appearances have appeared to skyrocket in recent years, also. Where can the blame for this be laid, do you think - organisers, feeling they have to make the most of the boom before it all goes tits up; special guests, sensing pound signs in the air and making hay while the sun shines; or simply the demand for content based around international properties? It's easier - and cheaper - for a UK convention to book a Bryan Talbot rather than a Brian Michael Bendis, for example...!

Global market expansion – Pure and simple. These events now are popular on a huge scale so much more than they were even as little as a few years ago. The way they are promoted and advertised has become so much more accessible to your average attendees especially with the outreach of social media that it is very easy for even ourselves to sell tickets on a global scale. With this increase in reach and size along with the popularity and attendance growth of course comes the financial one. Couple that with ever rising costs of bringing people to the events also and you can quickly start to see a huge escalation in your bill from the previous events.

What do you think the takeaway theme of 2019 conventions is going to be? More last minute cancellations or a tougher stance by the organisers? Back to basics or even bigger things to come?

I'd like to think that people learn to love the landscape again – Avoid the negative, be a positive beacon and influencer for all around you at events. If as organisers we have to get back to the basics with something then do not take it as a setback, look at it as a way to improve and make something great even better. I know for ourselves there is much change afoot with our events and all that comes with them across the entire board but I can promise you we will deliver something spectacular once again in terms of events and keep on proving that with a huge heart and determination you can be one of the greats. Build it and they will come. We keep building and cannot wait to see you there!

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BATMAN IN THE 1940'S

The decade of the Dynamic Duo...

Any self-respecting comic fan will tell you that the Batman first appeared in the hallowed pages of Detective Comics in 1939. His early appearances gave us a character that was darker and more menacing than the denizens of evil he faced down with each issue. But that was Bruce Wayne's idiom, in that "Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot..." He fought crime with excessive force, bringing a gun to a knife fight- quite literally in some cases!

Pleased with their newest superstar, DC, or National as they were still known at the time wanted to broaden the readership for the comic, wanting to introduce younger kids to the Caped Crusader. And what better way to do it than bring in a new character that the youngsters could identify with more.

So by issue thirty eight of Detective Comics the general comic reading populace were introduced to young Dick Grayson, Bruce Wayne's ward and fellow crime fighter, more commonly known as Robin the Boy Wonder.

The birth of the Dynamic Duo was an instant smash hit, and by the spring of 1940 Batman and Robin were debuting in their first ever solo book, entitled Batman. The launch issue contained a combination of stories, starting with a bare bones telling of Batman's origin, and how he was born as a result of the murder of his parents, with the young Bruce swearing vengeance against all evildoers.

Although the introduction of Robin was also meant to tone down the harshness and violence of the stories, the premiere issue introduced us to comicdom's definitive arch enemy; the Joker. He would become the yin to Batman's yang, and his first foray into the murky shadows of Gotham left the story littered with bodies.

Another self-contained solo Batman tale in this colossal issue finds Batman going up against an enemy, who for me is the equal of the Joker when it comes to the scare factor of the character. The gentleman's name was Dr Hugo Strange, who brought a whole different level of weird to Batman's already warped reality.

The villains at first seemed to be created as throwaway characters, whose sole purpose was to be the latest protagonist of the month and that was it. But so good was ghost writer Bill Finger at giving these twisted bad guys a depth not seen before in comics, that whether intentional or not, Finger was giving us the beginnings of Batman's Rogues Gallery.

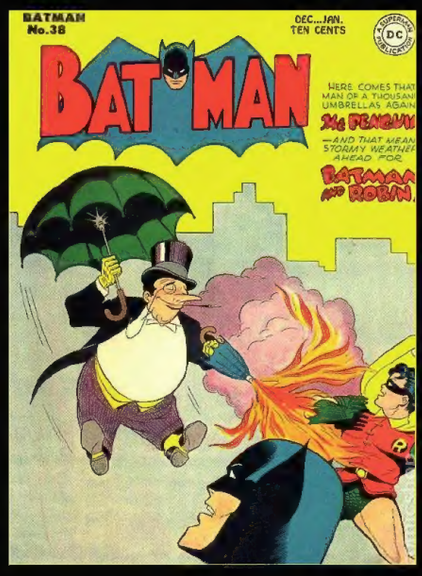
Not only did issue one give us not one, but two Joker stories, as well as the creepy Hugo Strange, we got a glimpse at a character that would return again and again, becoming a thorn, (or is that claw,) in Batman's side for years to come: Catwoman.

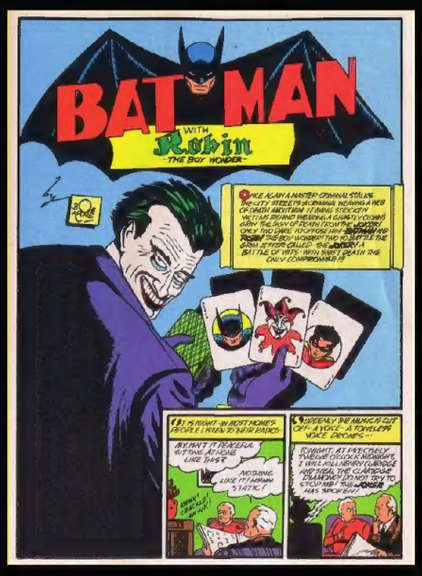
The decade of the forties gave us everything we've come to expect as part of a Batman and Robin staple diet, and although Bob Kane's name was pinned to the splash page of every issue, naming him as sole creator of the Dark Knight, this was stretching reality a wee tad. One had only to compare the dissimilar variety in the art to realise that more than one hand was on the paint brush. So numerous were the comics and syndicated newspaper strips of the 1940's that ghost writers and artists were brought on board to help churn out what one man could never do alone.

Artist Dick Sprang is mostly associated with Batman during this decade, depicting him more like an Olympic weightlifter in stature, complete with barrel chest. Batman was all bulk and beefcake when compared to artist Jerry Robinson's version. He gave us a sleeker Batman, who was lithe and athletic and fast. Robinson's pencils also seemed more grounded in reality, giving a world more identifiable to the reader. But both artists gave us something else previously unseen before and that was a Batman that smiled!

Although the approach was a lighter tone, the cavalcade of villainy heading the Dynamic Duo's way was as weird as ever.

There was Basil Karlo; an actor who turned to the dark side after going bonkers when he found out a film of his was to be remade, with another actor in the lead role.





He became Clayface. Batman and Robin foiled his plans, but he would return later with shapeshifting powers.

Jervis Tetch was another creepy character whose fixation for headwear would see him adopt the moniker of the Mad Hatter, a truly dangerous and disturbed adversary who had a penchant for mind control and hypnotism. He coveted Batman's cowl above all things.

Oswald Cobblepot, more commonly known as the Penguin is a bird themed master criminal with a vast array of deadly umbrellas. He may look comical, but his intellect for criminality makes him a dangerous bird with a sharp beak.

Edward Nigma's Riddler popped up in Detective Comics issue 140 in 1948. This trickster likes to tease his crimes with clues and puzzles. Nigma is quite possibly smarter than the Caped Crusader, and could possibly hold the title of arch enemy, if only he wasn't so obsessed with his game-playing.

The sinister Scarecrow first appeared in World's Finest Comics in 1941, and is perhaps Batman's most unsettling villain next to the Joker. Through the added combination of psychology, psychopharmacology and toxins created by him, Scarecrow quite literally scares his victims to death.

Rounding out this motley crew is Harvey Dent's warped psychosis in the form of Two-Face. He first showed his, um, two faces in Detective issue 66 in 1942. His Jekyll/Hyde personalities were always fixated with crimes that had a number two theme to them. He particularly had a loathing for a certain Boy Wonder.

Certain bad guys came and went, but others stayed the course, returning again and again to cross swords with the guardians of Gotham City, and let's face it, they were just too good to be dispatched with once and for all.

Along with the Rogues Gallery came the bat themed gadgets and vehicles, starting with the now legendary utility Belt, which at one point seemed to contain everything from aspirin to the kitchen sink! Dreamed up by writer Gardner Fox for Detective issue 29 in 1939, the belt contained capsules that emitted a choking gas when thrown. From then on the belt has housed a vast array of gadgetry, allowing Batman and Robin to extricate themselves out of some very tight spots on more than one occasion.

With all his crime fighting equipment cluttering up Wayne Manor, Batman needed a place to stash it all away from prying eyes. So a secret lair was dreamed up, giving batman a base of operations which also allowed him to keep his two identities separate.

Starting off as little more than a secret tunnel that led to a disused barn that housed the Batmobile, what was to become the Batcave evolved into something much, much more. With his popularity soaring, Batman went to the movies, quite literally, starring in a fifteen episodic action thriller with a cliff-hanger at the end of each instalment. Here we found Batman and Robin as sort of government agents, and with it being wartime; we found them fighting the evil Japanese dictator called Dr Daka.

During the making of the serial, Bob Kane visited the set and noted that the secret entrance to the Batcave was in the study of Wayne Manor, through the grandfather clock. This idea was soon incorporated into both comic and newspaper strips and has been a part of the Batman canon ever since.

As essential as the Batcave was to Batman mythos, no story was ever complete without the series' second most important character, that being Gotham City itself, that *!!@#?!-hole of a town where evil lurks around every darkened alley.

First identified in issue 4 of Batman, Gotham is synonymous with crime, and placing Batman in a different locale only seems to diminish his shadow somewhat. Gotham needs its protector, but just as equally, Batman needs Gotham.

The 1940's saw the Batman turn from a brooding, murderous vigilante into a square jawed all American hero, even encouraging children and adults alike to help in the war effort by buying war bonds, collect scrap metal and even salvage paper, and many an issue printed during the war years would have covers showing Batman, Robin and even Superman meting out justice to the Japanese or the Nazis. Could you imagine that happening today?

The forties built the foundations of Batman's world, populating it with characters just as popular now as when the artists first put pen to paper all those years ago. And before you know it, the 1950's is soon upon us all. But with a new decade looming just over the horizon, Batman would confront a new threat that would tax even the multi-problem solving utility belt of the Dark Knight. And that villain was to be called… censorship!

Author: Martin Dallard | **Twitter:** @MartinDallard

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DIGBY

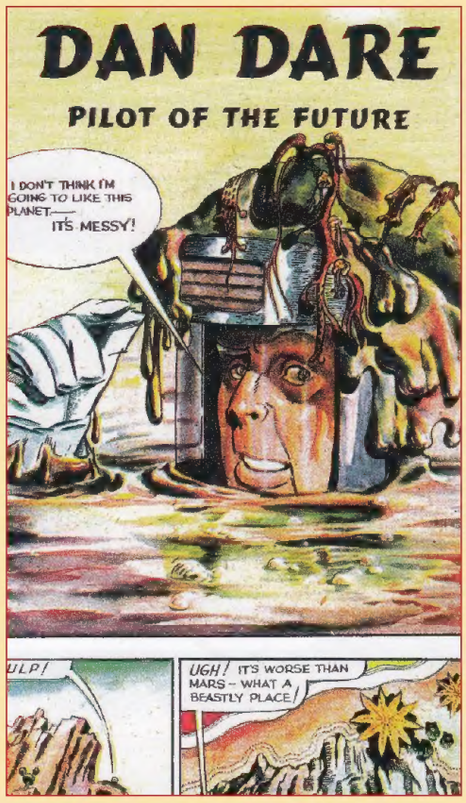
Albert Fitzwilliam Digby is Dan Dare's batman (note the small 'b' there, he is not likely to be Dan Dare's Batman because, in this pairing, Digby is clearly Robin to Dan's Batman). And if you think that's complicated let's just clear up where the word batman (note the small 'b' there – we all know how Batman got his name) actually comes from. It has its origin from Old French bat (itself from the medieval Latin bastum meaning 'packsaddle') + man and seems to have come into use in the mid-18th century and originally denoted an orderly in charge of the bat horse (packhorse) which carried the officer's baggage. So that's cleared that up.

Frank Hampson famously said that Dan was the man he always wanted to be but Digby was the man he actually was – which doesn't sound like much of a compliment unless you've read enough of the Dan Dare stories to know that Digby is a fiercely loyal man, devoted to Dan and not afraid to put himself in harm's way if it'll help him get Colonel Dan out of harm's way. We first meet Digby in the very first issue of Eagle, cover dated 14th April 1950, in the 3rd frame of the story (although it's not specified who he is at this stage); by page 2 of the story he is bringing Dan a breakfast of vitamin blocks; and by issue two he has been identified as Dan's batman. From the very beginning Digby's portly stature, love of the quiet life and general reticence to get involved in 'owt dangerous single him out as the 'comedy' element of the strip. He also appears to be disliked by every brand of matter-transporter in the galaxy as every time he uses one he ends up having his atoms scrambled just that little bit more than everyone else and, inevitably, arrives at his destination upside-down, while everyone else strolls out of them nonchalantly.

According to the pen portrait of Digby that is contained in Dan Dare's spacebook (1953) Spaceman (1st class) Albert Fitzwilliam Digby , Dan's batman, and faithful companion [was] born 1960 in Wigan, Lancs, married, 4 children (3 girls, 1 boy), hobbies: football, jigsaw, sleeping.

As well as these details the book also contains two items relating to Digby specifically that make it a 'must buy' for any Digby fans.

The first is a text strip entitled 'Aunt Anastasia comes to stay' – Aunt Anastasia is Digby's fearsome aunt, she makes her debut in the very first Dan Dare strip when she alerts the world to the planned Treen invasion of Earth. In this story however, she summons Digby home from his boys afternoon out (which he's trying to segue into a bit of a boys night out) and on his way home Dig is pulled over by the police for driving without due care and attention. The police! Digby! Crime! And then it gets worse as Digby is let off the offence once the policeman learns who is – Digby goes along with this obvious corruption (and in fact even makes Dan an accessory to his crimes by promising to get his autograph for the policeman's son) and then plays the 'home is the conquering hero' role as he shows off the police escort he has received home. Unbelievable behaviour from this son of Wigan. Completely shameless. Completely surprising? Maybe not if


DAN DARE
PILOT OF THE FUTURE
I DON'T THINK I'M GOING TO LIKE THIS PLANET.— IT'S MESSY!
ULP!
UGH! IT'S WORSE THAN MARS – WHAT A BEASTLY PLACE!

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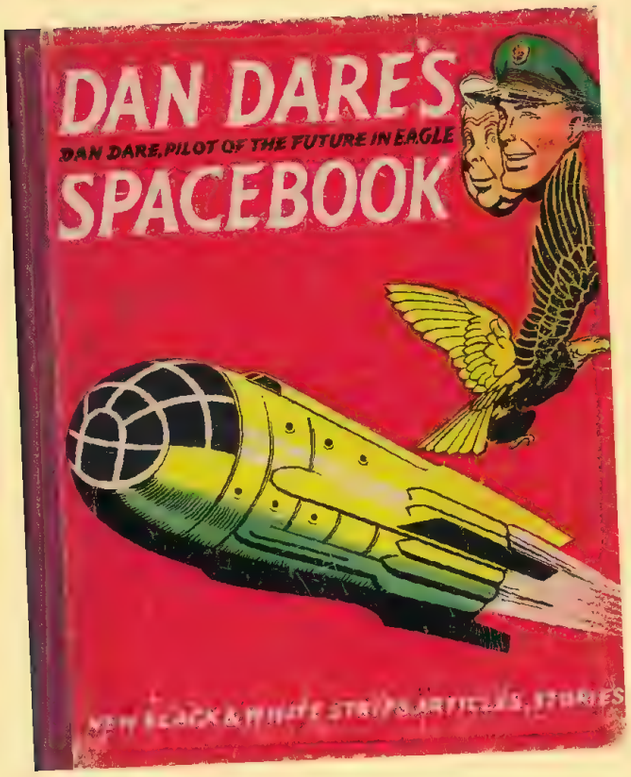
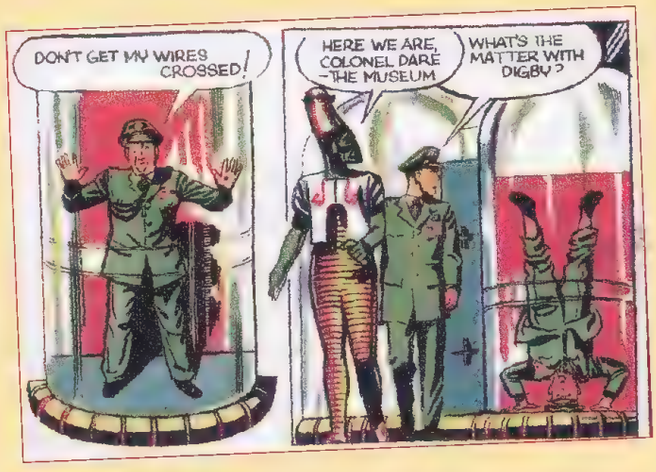


you thought of Digby as a lazy, self-centred, venal sort of figure but this is not the side of his character that the rest of his adventures played up. He's clearly a different character when Dan's not around. Overall though, this seems like a slightly odd story to feature in such a fine upstanding publication as the spacebook, what's the moral of the story that's trying to be conveyed here? Become famous and ignore the usual social conventions? Mind you the story is set in the year 2000 so perhaps it's just weirdly prescient view of the future.

Following on from this is a strip which is also in sharp contrast to anything that had gone before in the Dan Dare universe...The second gem in the spacebook is a 6-page comic strip entitled "Digby – the guinea pig", illustrated by Desmond Walduck (although page 1 looks like Frank Hampson's work to me). In this 6-page story Digby is trying on a spacesuit that's filled with a Venusian gas, Corium, that has, as Professor Peabody explains, an infinitely greater lifting power than hydrogen or helium. This means that the spacesuit, equipped with a nifty little rocket motor, could be used on Earth to help people fly around. Sadly the valve on the gas canister gets stuck open and, before you know it, Digby has been blown up like Violet Beauregarde and is suddenly flying around the Space Fleet site at 100mph. He flies in and out of aircraft hangars, escapes from the fire brigade (in a particular Keystone Kops style moment), flies in and out of Sir Hubert Guest's office, sends many people sprawling and is eventually downed by some fine sharpshooting by Sir Hubert. The pure comedy of the strip (the vapour trails that he leaves with the associated puffs of Corium give the whole thing such an air of slapstick) is so different to anything else that the Dare strip ever produced that it's a joy to read.

Of course there's plenty more Digby action out there is all the 'usual' Dan Dare strips but I just wanted to shed a light on these 2 very different Digby moments because they come from a volume that can be pricey (but worthwhile!) to acquire. So here's to the spaceman who's truly first class, Albert Fitzwilliam Digby.



"**Digby**, Dan's batman, and faithful companion [was] born 1960 in Wigan, Lancs, married, 4 children (3 girls, 1 boy), hobbies: football, jigsaw, sleeping."

Author: Richard Sheal | **Twitter:** @richardsheal | **Website:** boysadventurecomics.blogspot.co.uk/

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DAN DARE

EUROPE

Rebellion have recently collected for the first time all of Dan Dare's 2000 AD Adventures, in two hardback volumes. Starting with Massimo Belardinelli's outlandish take and concluding in the second volume with Dave Gibbons run on the character right up to the infamous cliffhanger ending.

Dare is one of Britain's best know comic characters and with artwork by Massimo Belardinelli and Dave Gibbons it is very unusual for a 2000 AD tale of this caliber not to have been reprinted previously.

IPC Magazines, the then publisher of 2000 AD, had a loose rule of not reprinting material that was less than five years old. The reasoning behind this policy was that the publishers felt that readers only read comics for a limited time before they moved on. If reprinted material was older than 5 years, there was a good chance that readers would not have read it before and presume it was new material.

By the time 2000 AD's Dare material became 'eligible' for reprinting under IPC rules, there was another version of Dan Dare blasting off in the pages of the New Eagle in 1982.

The new version of Dare which appeared in the New Eagle was very different to 2000 AD's version. The New Eagle Dare was a great-great grandson of the 1950's character who was more similar in tone to the original, rather than the brash 2000 AD version. To have two very different versions of Dare appearing in both of IPC's flagship boys' titles would not have made commercial sense, so 2000 AD's Dare was quietly forgotten.

The New Eagle ceased publication in 1994, and the rights to the character were soon sold to The Dan Dare Corporation. 2000 AD was subsequently bought by computer game developers 'Rebellion'. In 2013 an arrangement was made between Rebellion and Dan Dare Corporation to bring the 2000 AD version out of retirement for two luxurious hardbacks.

While 2000 AD's Dare remained in obscurity for nearly 40 years in Britain, the tale has enjoyed a wide audience across Europe and The Americas, having been reprinted there throughout the eighties.

'Ano 2000', the Brazilian edition of 2000 AD, introduced Dare to Latin America in 1979. 'Eks Almanah' brought Dare to 1980's communist Yugoslavia, and 'Agori' comic gave Greek readers the chance to read Dare's adventures. They all start with the Belardinelli version and finish with Dave Gibbons.

In France, Dare appeared in 'Tarzy Sun' in a size similar to the library format 'Commando Picture Library'.

Coming in at 132 pages, the original 2000 AD artwork had to be reformatted to fit the new size. Some new additions were added to the art, such as extending panels etc. Starting in issue 27, 1980, the format was black and white and monthly.

Issue 27 featured with Belardinelli's artwork with subsequent issues continuing Gibbons' run. Most interestingly, the covers were in colour. Some of the covers were just re-tooled panels from the comic, others were newly created covers. Dare was bizarrely titled 'SuperCrack'!

When 'Warrior' creator Dez Skinn started his American reprints of 2000 AD under the Quality banner in 1986, he took over Nick Landaus 'Eagle Comics' 'Judge Dredd' comic and '2000 AD Monthly'.

With 2000 AD Monthly number 5 Skinn renamed the comic '2000 AD Presents', Skinn introduced Dare in issue 7.

Dare's run in 2000 AD PRESENTS started with Dave Gibbons' artwork, Belardinelli's art was not reprinted.

Dave Gibbons' popularity was increasing rapidly in 1986 with the release of 'Watchman' (DC Comics), so his version of Dare was an obvious choice.

"The New Eagle ceased publication in 1994, and the rights to the character were soon sold to The Dan Dare Corporation"

The story was coloured for the American market, and while Skinn was in control, (until Issue 14), the colours were adequate.

After Issue 14, SQ Production of New Jersey took control of 2000 AD's output in America, and as a result, the colours suffered as did the artwork proportions.

The artwork was very slightly stretched to fit the page, as opposed to Dez Skinn's publications which reworked the art so it was at the right proportion for the American format.

Dare appears in '2000 AD Presents' until number 29, 1998. SQ Productions did introduce a departure from Skinn's version - new covers.

Some of the new covers were quite good, in particular those by Ron Randall. The colouring is so poor on other covers - with blue and purple Treens appearing, it's clear that the artist had little familiarity with the characters.

This was not the end of Dare in the States. In 1990, Fleetway Publications were the owners of both 2000 AD and Dan Dare. In an effort to boost the quality of 2000 AD's American output, a new venture was formed between SQ Production and Fleetway, called Fleetway Quality.

Paper stock was improved, stretching of the art was discontinued, and artwork was left in its original black and white.

'Dare the Impossible' was launched under the Fleetway Quality banner in 1991.

Similar to the earlier '2000 AD Presents' version, it started with Dave Gibbons' artwork and with 'Medivac 318' as backup. This was a much better presentation, the artwork was left in black and white and in it original proportions. Also worth noting is that this run featured some excellent newly commissioned covers by Ken Barr and Dave Dorman.

By far the most interesting reprint of Dare is from Spain. Dan Dare was hugely popular in Spain in the 1950's appearing as 'Diego Valor' in Radio plays, Stage plays and even TV shows.

'Diego Valor' also appeared in new comics created in Spain but using the original British version as inspiration. In 1979 Dare was still popular enough in Spain for a new Dan Dare comic to be launched.

Its content was mostly from the newly launched 2000 AD. It featured the Harlem Heroes, BlackHawk Flesh, Judge Dredd and of course Dan Dare. It issued monthly in black and white throughout and ran to 48 pages.

The first 10 issues featured stunning wraparound covers by Josep Maria Miralles, perfectly complimenting Massimo Belardinellis hyper detailed art inside. It ran for 18 issues with later covers by L. Bargalló depicting Dave Gibbons' run.

UK readers are finally getting the chance to thrill at Dan Dare's 2000 AD adventures.

The stunning new cover to Rebellion's second collection is by veteran artist Ian Kennedy, best known for his depiction of the New Eagle version of Dan Dare.

The majority of the artwork is supplied by Dave Gibbons and with the 'Servant of Evil' story he is really hitting his stride artistically.

The collection also includes episodes by Trevor Goring, who has worked as a storyboard artist on Films such as Thor, X-Men, Constantine and many more.

It's also notable for having some of Brian Lewis' last work before his death. Lewis was a Sci-Fi book cover artist in the 60's as well as being the artist on Tigers' Jet Ace Logan. The book is rounded off with a cover gallery, short Dare stories from The Dan Dare annuals, 2000 AD annuals and Sci-Fi specials.

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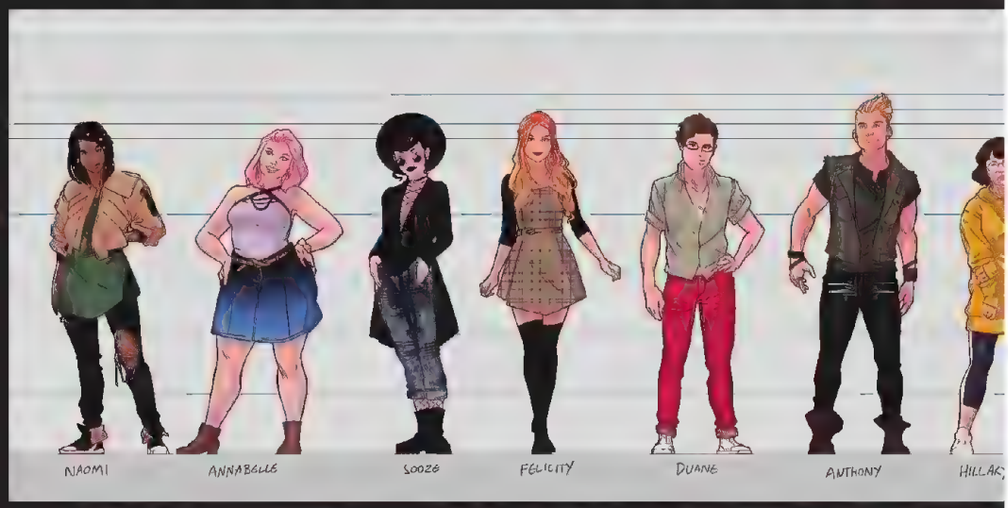
WONDER COMICS

After being offered his own pop-up imprint by DC Comics Co-publisher Dan Didio after moving from Marvel, Brian Michael Bendis's initial plan was to concentrate on crime. But as he put the finishing touches on his final assignments for the House of Ideas, wrapping up his runs on erstwhile Ultimate Spider-Man Miles Morales and Ironheart's Riri Williams, he realised that what DC lacked was a home for its teen titles that could provide accessible comics to younger readers.

"I knew I wasn't going to out-weird Gerard Way or out-Gaiman Neil Gaiman, so it took me a while to figure out what to do," he recalls, referring respectively to the creative talents behind DC's Young Animal and Sandman Universe imprints. "I wanted to do something that much like Marvel's Ultimate line would be a reader-friendly introduction for readers of that age, where you're very much focused on that moment in life where you really are filled with the wonder of life, and all the things that come from discovering the world, and the starting point for that was Young Justice."

With Didio frustrated that DC wasn't regularly publishing Young Justice despite the continuing success of the Cartoon Network animated series, which is just entering its third season,



the teenaged superhero team were an obvious choice to spearhead the line. Having debuted in January, the Patrick Gleason-penciled monthly brought together old hands Tim 'Robin' Drake, Connor 'Superboy' Kent, super speedster Impulse and Cassie

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Sandsmark aka Wonder Girl with new recruits Wild West gunslinger Jonah Hex's granddaughter Jinny Hex, the mysterious Teen Lantern and Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld. "Amethyst was very ahead of its time and it would do very well today in that it reads like a lot of Image Comics from the past few years," says Bendis, referring to Dan Mishkin, Gary Cohn and Ernie Colon's original 1983 limited series. "I just loved it as it was full of imagination and hope and all sorts of good stuff, so I said 'let's go to Gemworld for the first arc of Young Justice and see how it's doing,' and I just hit the jackpot with Dan Didio as I didn't actually know that he loved Amethyst so much."

Having penned 133 issues of Ultimate Spider-Man for starters, Bendis really enjoys the more vibrant dynamic between the more youthful characters. "They're on a very tight learning curve because they know very well that they're in the middle of something important in their lives, and they're doing it with their friends, who have really become their family," he reasons. "This is the moment in their lives where the romance is so potent and the heartbreak is so devastating.

Everything is so meaningful, and that's why people love reading stories about that time of life. I see it with my younger kids when they read teenage stories, which are almost like an Apocrypha of what's to come, while older people read those stories and know where the truth is, as we can all relate to that."

According to Bendis, Young Justice are fundamentally different to DC's other main teen super-group. "Teen Titans are more of an organisation, and their goal is to become the Justice League while Young Justice are like 'we are the Justice League, we're the best of all them!'" laughs Bendis. "It's a very different attitude towards all of this, and it's not like they're going to grow up to be something, they already are something. And they don't have a headquarters or mission base like the Titans, they'll just text each other where to meet and what the mission is, so it's kind of like Mission Impossible."

Co-created with his long-time friend David F. Walker (Cyborg, Luke Cage) and drawn by Jamal Campbell, Naomi takes its lead from Bendis's work on Jessica Jones. "It's about an original character like Jessica Jones, who is put into DC continuity, and in doing so brings something completely different with her," says Bendis, who teaches alongside Walker as part of Portland

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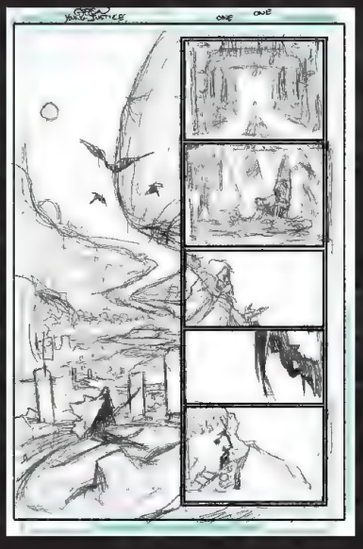
"THE TEENAGED SUPERHERO TEAM WERE AN OBVIOUS CHOICE TO SPEARHEAD THE LINE"



State University's Comics Program. "We've become very close friends and David was very influential in the healthy development of Miles Morales, as I 'd often go to him for guidance and support. So he was very involved with Miles and so I wanted to take that aspect of our relationship to the next level. During our conversations as educators, we'd often talk about the hero's journey and what it means today. We were already teaching it, so we thought we'd actually do it ourselves and Naomi grew out of that."

Like Jessica Jones, Naomi doesn't actually need to adopt a superhero alias. "Sometimes it's like with Jessica Jones or Luke Cage, that's just their name, and it was the same with Naomi," explains Bendis. "If one day she gets a codename that comes about because of her character traits then that's fine. But it's one of the things about our medium that we think we have to do all the time but actually we don't."

Bendis also insists that Naomi doesn't have much in common with Riri Williams. "They're very different characters," he says. "Naomi is about a girl who lives on the Pacific Northwest in a small town where she is the only

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brown-skinned person. She's adopted, and she's very happy and well adjusted, and all is good in her life until Superman and Mongol crash into the middle of their town one day and just bounce right out. It's just like a cameo - 'Boom!' - straight in and out. But everyone talks about that moment and how it's the most exciting thing to happen in their town for seventeen years, which was the last time it happened. That was around the time that Naomi was adopted, so Superman's appearance in her world as the most famous adopted person makes her question her own adoption, and what she discovers will be a very new and huge additive thing to the DC Universe."

Bendis has also had a hand in the other two Wonder Comic titles, February's Wonder Twins by Mark Russell and Stephen Byrne - which centres around extraterrestrial brother and sister Zan and Jayna - and March's Dial H for Hero by Sam Humphries and Joe Quinones. "I was desperate to write Wonder Twins myself and I had a very strong take on it so I said I'd do that unless we could find someone who would have an even better idea for it because the prospect of crafting it was so exciting to me," he admits. "Then I walked into my local store Excalibur Comics in Portland and the owner grabbed me and said that 'the best comic on the shelf right now is Flintstones!' So I picked it up, read it and loved it and thought 'boy, I'd love to read a Wonder Twins comic by Mark Russell!' With Dial H For Hero, I was reading the DC Encyclopedia, remembering all of my favourite things and all the stuff I loved. Dial H For Hero is one of the best ideas for a comic book ever, and I just thought it would be great to get Sam Humphries to write it."

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MARVEL SUPERHEROES

CAPTAIN BRITAIN & ME

A life-changing comics experience in 11 pages

(or... it was all Alan Moore's fault)

Every comic fan has that moment, that defining moment where they discover the one comic that completely changes their reading life. For me, I can pinpoint the exact comic, down to a single page. It was Captain Britain, 'Graveyard Shift', by Alan Moore and Alan Davis, in Marvel Superheroes Monthly issue 388, cover dated August 1982.

Of course, I'd read comics in the past, Beano and Dandy from the newsagent, Raymond Briggs, Asterix and Tintin albums from Dudley library, and a first brush with superheroes with the Marvel UK Captain America Weekly and Hulk Weekly of '81 and '82. I'd even seen the prior incarnation of Captain Britain in the, frankly, pretty generic Marvel US created red costume version Captain Britain Weekly, and later, in the rather better Black Knight 'Otherworld Saga', from the pages of Hulk Comic, as created by the all-Brit team of Steve Parkhouse and John Stokes.

But, although they lit the fire, they weren't what set me on a path of loving comics as a medium. No, that moment came in summer 1982 with my very first experience of seeing the new Captain Britain, that first experience reading the words of Alan Moore, my first sight of Alan Davis's artwork. Marvel Superheroes 388 and Captain Britain in the five pages of 'Graveyard Shift'.

From the very first panel of those five b&w pages, my young mind knew this was something very special, as we zoom down onto the terrifying, unstoppable, killing machine, The Fury, still one of the scariest baddies I've ever seen in comics. And then there's the other great supervillain, the wonderfully insane Mad Jim Jaspers, with his every-changing hats, this crooked man with his crooked smile is responsible for the reality warp infecting this alternate Earth. Both

characters would go on to feature heavily through the entire run of Moore and Davis' Captain Britain saga, but here, with my first meeting, I was enthralled, instantly.

Within five pages, Moore and Davis covered so much, with a density of storytelling that summarised all that had gone before, before Moore proceeded to rip everything down to deliver his own take on things. Jaspers explains, to a broken Captain Britain, his plot to rise to power politically, with a mission to demonise and outlaw superhumans that led to the eventual creation of The Fury and its mission to wipe out every superhuman on the planet, except old Mad Jim himself. Now, Captain Britain is the only superhuman left, and, although he's not of this Earth, The Fury is tracking him down, relentlessly, his death inevitable. Seeing the hero of the comic broken, beaten, driven to despair and hopelessness, fearing he's going to lose his mind on this alternate world that isn't his, that was a revelation to my young comic reading mind. This simply wasn't the way you treated your heroes.

It all ends with Captain Britain crashing down into a graveyard, with a host of strange superhero names across the gravestones, names I'd eventually come to realise were nods to the great and the good of Brit comics of old, Iron Tallon, The Arachnid, Android Andy, even Miracleman, to say nothing of Captain UK, another character that would go on to play a major role in what was to come.

And then, that final, devastating page. Oh my, it tore at me, a shattered Captain Britain screaming in the mist, with the Fury appearing, death personified, over the Captain's shoulder. And then, the death, so final, brutal... the Fury rendering Captain Britain to nothing more than a rag, a bone, a hank of hair.

'Graveyard Shift' might have been just five pages long, but it changed everything I knew about comics. This was NOTHING like anything I'd read before. And I was hooked.

This turned out to be the last appearance of Captain Britain in Marvel Superheroes, with the next issue box's promise of 'A Rag, A Bone, A Hank Of Hair' not coming until issue 1 of The Daredevils, a ridiculously long four months hence. Over the next few months, pocket money was saved, issues were ordered and I read the entire new Captain Britain, from Marvel Superheroes 377-388. Before Moore came on board as writer with issue 387 and an uncredited final page on issue 386, Dave Thorpe wrote the strip, along with a very raw Alan Davis on art. Thorpe brought a playfulness and a political aspect, one that will be looked at, in-depth, by Peter Gouldson (later in this issue). But, the truly amazing aspect of the early run for me was seeing Davis go from good but flawed amateur artist to something practically unrecognisable from what would become his signature style within a few months. But, no matter how good those Thorpe/Davis issues were, Captain Britain, for me, is all about Moore and Davis.

Basically, my comic reading life is all Alan Moore and Captain Britain's fault. Because, in just 11 pages, and especially

those final five pages of 'Graveyard Shift', Moore changed my comics reading world with a spectacular, turn my young world upside down, storyline. Moore and Alan Davis' Captain Britain may not be the greatest comic I've ever read, but nothing will remove it from that special place in my heart. It doesn't matter if it's the original b&w or the recoloured versions, each has their own particular appeal, with Helen Nally's colours on the work definitely an excellent and sympathetic addition to the artwork.

Thanks to Captain Britain, I went looking for more of Alan Moore and more of Alan Davis, the first comic names I sought out, and that led on to Warrior magazine, V for Vendetta, Marvelman, and set me on a path that continues to this day. Yes, it's all Alan Moore's fault. I hope one day to be able to thank him.

Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:** @richardbruton

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MARVEL UK

The first ten (or so) years of Marvel UK

Part Two: A Book Length Thriller Every Week!

Stan Lee PRESENTS
COMIC-BRITAIN'S OWN SUPERH
CAPTAIN BRITA
IN HIS OWN
NEW MAG
10 PAGES IN FULL COLOUR
EVERY WEEK THIS GREAT NEW MAG WILL FEATURE IN FULL COLOUR ... THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN BRITAIN. ALSO IN COLOUR: SECRET AGENT ACTION WITH NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.! PLUS IN BRILLIANT BLACK AND WHITE-THE CONTINUING SAGA OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
NEXT
FREE
CAPTAIN BRITAIN

Autumn 1974 saw 'British Marvel' chasing the current trends towards more fantasy based titles, with both Planet of the Apes (POTA) and Dracula Lives launching week ending 26th October.

[redacted] diminishing quality. Nevertheless the franchise stayed [redacted] 's impact on British TV screens that Autumn.

[redacted] younger viewers. Unlike the regular Ape annuals [redacted] six-year old movie. The title nevertheless flourished, bringing many viewers into the Marvel fold and keeping [redacted] Panther and, um... Doctor Doom.

[redacted] off an early crisis with available reprint material, a small run of issues suddenly featured a character called [redacted] Killraven strip from the US Amazing Adventures science-[redacted] result was what could technically lay claim to be the first [redacted]

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'100 page full colour bonanzas for 50p, featuring Spiderman, Fantastic Four, Hulk, Conan and Doctor Strange...'

even three oddballers of Killraven did slip through the net. Both HOTA and Dracula Lives launched at 8p, at that point a penny more than the older Marvel UK titles had all been dropped to, as a result of paying the gifts, accompanied by impressive glam colour posters.

As the impressive glitz the Marvel Spiderman and Avengers Annuals among their Xmas pressies 1975 Hardback by World Distributors all to whet titles not to be seen in the UK weeklies. The page count may have shrunk in comparison with the previous Fleetway annuals but the glossy, full colour covers more than made up for it. With a page count that would've put Mytharama to shame, the 1975 Marvel annuals arguably mark the peak of the boom.

Indeed, Marvel UK in general entered the new year in rude health. The Marvel Calendar 1975 promised over a number of weeks only heightening the sense of excitement with full of promise. Each weekly boasted a new quality item. Between a Home Spiderman Hulk. Those reading the mail on the Hulk... Dave Cockburn producing cover dotting work for Daredevil, Kirkby and Colan's artwork + Gerard Hamilton's Conan and more.

Speculation over Kirby's return to Marvel was finally laid to rest with the announcement that Kirby was set to return to the Fantastic Four and Thor were also working where new titles, and if Kirby's groundbreaking full page "Kirbygrams" messages occasionally had their impact due to the printing process, the sheer brilliance of the storytelling is unaffected by the intervening decades as we are treated to the welcome Galactus and the Silver Surfer on issue 48 and 49.

It's such a shame that the line appeared further with yet another two months launching the same week ending 8th March. There'd been strong demand in the reading for both the Silver Surfer and

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the X-Men to enter the UK scene permanently, and both were chosen for new launch 'The Superheroes'. In John Buscema the Surfer strip had another artist whose work lost none of its vibrancy in the larger black and white format, lending Stan Lee's own favourite cosmic fable its touching poignancy and epic grandeur. The second launch seemed similarly predestined, with the continued Stateside success of Roy Thomas' take on Robert E Howard's barbarian character Conan almost demanding the Cimmerian have a stab at the UK market. Happily, both the new Savage Sword of Conan title and Superheroes launches continued the trend of impressive free posters.

Yet there were now seven Marvel weeklies in a UK marketplace that was contracting sharply. At a time when finances dictated that readers be ruthless with decisions at the newsagents counter, Marvel sought to turn heads even further in their direction. As well as another chance to join the hallowed ranks of FOOM there was the continual flood of merchandise offers, including a rather stunning Jim Steranko Hulk cover patch. Each weekly also heavily featured in-house ads for every new Marvel Treasury Edition, tempting giant size (13.5 x 10 inch) 100 page full colour bonanzas for 50p, featuring Spiderman, Fantastic Four, Hulk, Conan and Doctor Strange as well as seasonal 'Grab-Bag' specials.

The bubble had to burst. Failing to gain a foothold in the market, Savage Sword of Conan's run lasted a mere 18 weeks before merging with the Avengers week ending 12th July, where the Conan strip forlornly added to an already uneven mix. Marvel UK had produced its very first flop.

Yet a sense of forward momentum was not long in coming. The launch of the Titans week ending 25th October saw the company ripping up the rulebook and making its boldest move yet. Showcasing an innovative new landscape format, Titans utilised two shrunken down US Marvel pages and placed them side by side on each sideways UK page, effectively doubling the content. Justifiably proud of the innovation, the company invested in a nationwide television advertisement campaign and publicity tour by Stan Lee himself. The extensive press coverage came at a time when two major events saw the company's profile in the UK rise higher than ever; a two week exhibition of original art at the ICA Gallery at the Mall in London and a personal appearance by Lee at London's Roundhouse on October 20th. The Roundhouse event was a huge success, Lee happily answering questions from an enthusiastic young crowd as artist Herb Trimpe sketched away in a corner and fans posed for photos with 'Spiderman' himself.

For many of those present, Titans would seem a compulsory purchase. With an unprecedented five strips the new comic's higher than usual 9p price tag still seemed a bargain. The Inhumans, Captain America and Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD all hit the reader in an opening Kirby salvo before a solo Sub-Mariner and an early incarnation of Captain Marvel concluded affairs. The launch also came with arguably the best Marvel UK free gift ever, a stunning John Buscema poster (actually a design used to promote a 1975 US Marvel convention) featuring a plethora of then current Marvel characters. Following weeks would also see the innovative 'centre-spread' poster introduced, in effect weekly UK-exclusive posters, elongated and stretched to encompass the two landscape centre pages.

Yet the new format was extremely labour intensive. While other Marvel weeklies had been producing new interior splash pages by the likes of Pablo Marcos and others, the landscape format demanded either heavily redesigned or brand new covers constantly. There was a two week 'emergency issue' run early on, with a reduction to 32 pages without the glossy cover at a reduced 8p price tag. The promised results of an art competition were held back and an Inhumans centre spread (marking what was already their final appearance before being replaced by the X-Men) was postponed. 'Technical problems too numerous to enumerate forced us to bring out (these) two issues.' ran a, for once, rather uninformative

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Sufficient bubble bustage, which at least prevented it from happening again.

Some investors at the time, to the first weekly reprint publication of Marvel material, must have wished they'd kept quiet. Stan Lee's Fantastic Four in a Cancelled Issue strip particularly stunning in full colour but came with a reduced page count. Here also me to the period where a host of mad revolving door comic writing credits (mostly Lee) and editors with strips constantly swapping drive, taking short breaks, or

Suppressing complexity. An artist relationship needed to be at Marvel Management 1977 senses their judgement of exactly what was happening and where it was also becoming clear that the new Titans format wasn't to everyone's taste, with letter pages under many readers noted just as the comic itself was becoming more interesting. Alan Hall Spider-Woman died up and the X-Men moved on the title became a kind of holding area for many lowkey, short lived strips, or what some uncharitably described as the Marvel's not much of Marvel's most interesting work came in these short sharp bursts from the fringes of the composite. Predators, Jaws the Claws of the Cat and Supernatural also the Scarecrow had initial concepts that were made for the time, and was. Giant Man and the Wasp, already running quietly well in Dick Ayers' art, jumped perfectly suited to a title full of misfits. Towards the end of the run Barry Smith's Weird Worlds with stories from the Marvel Twelve One-offs, bringing back prolific creators such as Hulk and Iron Man, and the title even managed to briefly showcase the new incarnation of the Black Knight, Sir Percy of Scandal to play a bigger role in a tales style Hellcat, calling it a day with issue 20 and merging with the ever popular Spider-Man Tales ending 23rd February 1978.

The move meant hugely controversial, promised Super Spider-Man with the Daredevils with issue 113, the now-back weekly now acquired the Tabloid style Landscape format. Packed with strips such as Machine Man, Doctor Strange and the Thing, the title entered year for some was its true golden age. A free gift poster from unusually a second gift a few years later of a Spiderman window sticker only added to the allure of a title that undoubtedly packed a punch. Yet with Marvel's big publishing investment the Spider-Man Tales wasn't easy comedy. Even putting aside the well-known but much loved strip, some of the most talented work was in the Marvel canon (such as Steve Englehart and Frank Brunner's Doctor Strange) was now presented in a format where, for one at least, having to use a magnifying glass and turning the page sideways is just not my idea of a good time. (I'll be down in Green Story when it's worked through).

The reprinted title was also offering an centre spreads of increasing eccentricity. Classic British comic artist from Harrogate even joined in on the act with a couple of lovely (if unsurprisingly non Marvel like) war strips. It was also an immediate split across poster with four pictures of a massed opposing battle over the Thames. Incorrect to both Londoners and Americans, had weeks in June 1976, as he knew much more of Dracula. There was also the poorly depicted scene of Submariner dragon in a face off with Iron Spider-Man Thing wrestling yet another dragon. An extremely violent Rodney Dangerfield broke the record of the week, whilst on another

UK editor Neil Tennant saw fit to prepare the readership a week early about the forthcoming, rather bizarre 'Into Battle' centre-spread from Herb Trimpe.

Tennant himself was proving to be the most high profile UK editor thus far, his tenure marked by the more discursive nature of the editorials. He was clearly however nankering after his own future in the pop music business already, needing little excuse to feature interviews with the likes of self confessed Marvel maniac Marc Bolan. Next week: meet Alex Harvey, another Marvel fan from the world of rock music!')

An insightful glimpse of a US perspective of the British enterprise came in early '76 with the March edition of FOOM Magazine, the tone of which struck a note of sheer incredulity:

'The product is produced weekly - and in four years they've managed to nearly catch up to the present day Marvel! The continuity does get a little strange at times, due to this incredible acceleration. For example - presenting the entire run of 'the Panthers Rage' in the British Planet of the Apes magazine (really!!!) while the Panther is still running around in reprints of the Avengers stories from four or five years before. The Marvel Universe is being presented to the British audience as a cosmic jigsaw puzzle.

The tone may have been one of mild shock but the analysis was sound enough; with the weekly schedule, readers of British Marvel had borne witness to a Universe that had (unevenly) evolved beyond all recognition in just four short years, and the pieces of that cosmic jigsaw puzzle were getting harder and harder to fit into place. As the X-Men replaced Inhumans in Titans, they'd soon find themselves replaced by the Fantastic Four. For the shortest of times the X-Men sought refuge in MWOM which itself seemed to temporarily lose the plot with a small run of out-of-synch covers, including an infamous repeat of one already published. At least there was no repeat of an earlier scare when the Hulk had appeared orange.

The turbulence continued through that longest of long hot summers. As everyone's Spiderman window sticker quickly faded in the sun, two weekly titles were lost in quick succession. First Dracula Lives merged into POTA week ending 23rd June, then the failing Avengers, their titular strip on the cusp of the classic Kree-Skrull War storyline, merged into MWOM week ending 21st July. Earth's Mightiest Heroes wouldn't hang around for long before taking their own place in the revolving door that was the Titans main feature. Their own replacement in MWOM, Luke Cage, Hero for Hire, was soon joined by Captain Marvel, a strip that had already embarked on its own classic Jim Starlin/Thanos storyline when it had suddenly disappeared after Titans issue 30. Thus were the intricacies of the 'cosmic jigsaw puzzle'.

Of course in most instances, the reasoning behind the revolving door madness was simple necessity. Certain strips had to be rested as the reprints either simply caught up with (or as in the case of the Surfer and Inhumans, already used up) the available inventory. Worryingly however, even the likes of the Spiderman strip was now dangerously close to being less than a year behind the US.

A retrospective celebrating 200 issues of MWOM that July seemed to address the issue and hinted at what was to come; 'As we celebrate…all of the British Marvel weeklies feature only reprinted American stories, a state of affairs which will not last forever. That cryptic comment is all we're allowed to say at the moment.

What followed was an in-house advertisement campaign with a lot riding on it, as a brand new Marvel superhero, one created specifically with a UK audience in mind, was slowly unveiled over the coming weeks. When Captain Britain did finally launch week ending 13th October, Stan Lee was again on hand to spearhead the publicity. Much was rightly made of having an original main feature in a new comic that seemed innovative and fresh with half of the 32 page,10p title allocated coloured pages. Lee's usual first issue editorial hard sell seemed more than justified - 'Imagine…specifically written and drawn just for you! Never before printed in any other magazine…we're determined to make Captain Britain the greatest comic weekly of all time'.

Yet with what would prove to be a lack of foresight, Britain's Own Superhero came completely produced and packaged in the US, with writer Chris Claremont and artist Herb Trimpe seemingly getting the gig by default by having both spent some time at least in the country. The resultant Captain Britain origin story, hurtling the reader straight into the heart of the action, is not without charm, even if the denouement in issue 2 overran the limited coloured section, resulting in a hilarious final black and white 'do-it-yourself colouring page'. The FF filled the middle section where the temporary return to black and white actually came as a jolt before the issue rounded off with

the technicolour splendour of Jim Steranko's Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. This first SHIELD instalment had its true title, 'Spy School' thoughtfully held back for the following weeks instalment.

When UK readers finally did come across the, um, spy school itself. A laboriously reworked splash page ('you're in for the most exciting education in comics - welcome to the SPY SCHOOL! ') showed the care and consideration that was still being taken by those responsible for the production of the UK weeklies. A cardboard Captain Britain mask and boomerang did however usher in an era of truly awful launch free gifts.

In fairness, the title seemed aimed at an even more juvenile readership than usual with its regular fun pages and puzzles, making the sharp satire of Steve Gerber's Howard the Duck a strange choice for an innovative pull out middle section in issue

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"The turbulence continued through that longest of long hot summers. As everyone's Spiderman window sticker quickly faded in the sun, two weekly titles were lost in quick succession."

7. Meanwhile the good Captain's brush with first real super-bad guy Hurricane did enjoy a certain frisson, our hero initially outclassed by the sheer brute force of his adversary. Yet Claremont bailed as early as issue 11, with Gary Friedrich taking over a rapidly declining series of weekly instalments which all too quickly became just another (albeit second or third rate) carbon copy of the US house style.

Seemingly this wasn't the only title crashing into hurdles. The Titans own energetic sprint, so dynamically taken up on that very first cover, ran out of steam by issue 58. Merging with a similarly landscaped Super Spiderman title saw to it that the 'shape of comics' debate would continue to rage in letter pages a while longer yet, and by the time Spiderman finally reverted back to 'normal' with issue 229, the main strip was already utilising material from the new US Spectacular Spiderman title simply to buy more time.

1976 had proven to be a real turning point with now only four weeklies (Spiderman/Titans, MWOM, POTA/Dracula, Captain Britain) left intact. With the UK office themselves now putting forward suggestions, MWOM suddenly introduced Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos into the line up at the end of the year. If their rowdy stay didn't initially last long (relieved of duty by the merger of MWOM with POTA in February 1977, introducing an era of 'split' Hulk/Ape covers) it proved merely the precursor to Marvel UK making its own entry into the blood and guts battlefield of UK war comics. Hoping to replicate the continuing success of homegrown titles such as Warlord and Battle, Fury launched week ending 16th March 1977 with a fantastic hard-hitting Dave Gibbons cover.

It was downhill from there. Despite the typically dynamic Lee/Kirby reprints, the Howling Commandos were far removed from the type of war yarn the UK readership were accustomed to, with Fury's attempt to ape the look and feel of homegrown titles doomed from the start. Despite some wonderful original Carlos Esquerra covers, the last post was played out as early as issue 25, the Commandos beating a hasty retreat back to MWOM where they enjoyed equal billing for far too long, replacing what many considered the far superior Dracula strip. The Count himself had only recently been resurrected, replacing the Apes who had finally reached the end of the road.

Meanwhile Captain Britain's fresh and innovative launch already felt a distant memory. By issue 24 the title had become just another 36 page Marvel weekly, losing its interior colour if gaining a glossy cover. It was over by issue 39, the main strip absorbed into Spiderman's newly 'normalised' format week commencing 13th July. There the strip seemed to die a slow death, the last rites coming in issue 253 before symbolically being replaced by Captain America. If Britain's own superhero would go on to reach his full potential when handled with more care in a not too distant future, for now very few mourned his passing.

Yet there were plenty of new additions to the line before the years end. The Complete Fantastic Four seemed worthy recognition for Marvels first family after playing the bridesmaids for so long, their new exclusive title bringing along an unusual format with a completely unedited recent reprint backed by the early Lee / Kirby classics. A second weekly title soon followed, Rampage offering a combination of the Dynamic Defenders (drawing largely on the Hulk's still formidable following) backed up with newcomer Nova. The mix seemed to work, even if the title would need to undergo dramatic change before ultimately proving it had the greater staying power.

Its own metamorphosis was hinted at shortly thereafter, when the company took a bold and unexpected step. Despite the abject failure of the Conan weekly, November 1977 saw the character return [illegible] this time Marvel UK's very first monthly publication. Aimed at an older, mature audience the monthly reprinted the more graphic storylines presented in the black and white US Conan magazine (and not subject to Comic Code Authority restrictions). The timing of this new 35p, 52 page magazine seemed to capture the zeitgeist, with a general upsurge in all things sci-fi/fantasy and even talk of a possible Conan movie in the air.

However this late flurry of new titles towards the end of 1977 had given a false impression. The cancellations and mergers of recent times had hit the company badly, with the failure of Captain Britain a particularly bitter pill to swallow. Only mainstays MWOM and the Spiderman title had seemingly weathered the storm and sailed on, unperturbed.

Salvation of a kind lay ahead, already glimpsed in a pair of Marvel Treasury Editions that hit newsagents counters towards the end of the year. A deal struck to adapt an upcoming movie by George Lucas would prove to be a game-changer for both Marvel US and the UK division. As preparations for the launch of a new science fiction UK title got underway, mystifying ads placed across the weekly line all asked the same perplexing questions of readers, introducing many for the first time to the strange spellings of exotic names they'd soon come to know so well. 'Who is Luke Skywalker? What are See Threepio and Artoo Deetoo? Where is Obi-Wan Kenobi?'

Next time: More monthlies…galaxies far, far away… and revolution.

…and for an extensive look at Dracula Lives check out my 'Stalking the Shadows Dracula In the UK' article in the Volume 1 Issue 4 Issue of ComicScene.

Author: Peter Gouldson | **Twitter:** @gouldp7070 | **Images:** Images are © 2018 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved

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'DISENGAGE THAT ELF!'

Captain Britain by Thorpe & Davis

An alternate Earth played host to a surreal re-launch in 1981

Everything fades away as the two companions fall through the empty white void, dispatched from one world to another.

'At last! Back to Earth,' utters a familiar looking taller figure.

Time passes...it's length 'immeasurable'.

Well, not quite. Around 17 months give or take, and the two travellers are the elf Jackdaw and Britain's very own superhero, Captain Britain. After leaving the pages of Hulk Comic towards the conclusion of the 'Otherworld' Black Knight saga (the first instance of a British creative team handling the character) our dashing hero was finally returning in his own strip. Yet this particular return proved to be something completely different, with it clear from the second panel that things had changed. Irrevocably.

So, why is it that the events of the first ten issues of the 1981 relaunch don't immediately spring to mind when thinking of this particular character's defining moments or eras? Drawn by new-on-the-scene talent Alan Davis and scripted by fellow newcomer Dave Thorpe, our good Captain careens through a series of madcap scenarios before Alan Moore, early on in his own career, takes over as scribe to make an indelible mark. Often forgotten, missing from some trade collections (despite running straight into Moore's run and first introducing many of the key characters and elements which follow) the Thorpe/Davis run seems forever consigned to pond backwater

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of comics history. Which is a shame, as for many reasons this small body of work is just so much fun.

The relaunch had its origins in the new direction Editor-in-Chief Paul Neary sought across the whole of the Marvel UK line around 1981. Effectively in place from around spring of 1980, Neary had slowly began making his mark following the 'Marvel Revolution' of 1979. The particularly juvenile look of the weekly titles began to be countered by new titles such as Marvel Action (showcasing Alan Davis' first professional mainstream work on the cover of its launch issue) and Marvel Super-Adventure, where full length storylines would attempt to offer something a little bit different from the average weekly fare.

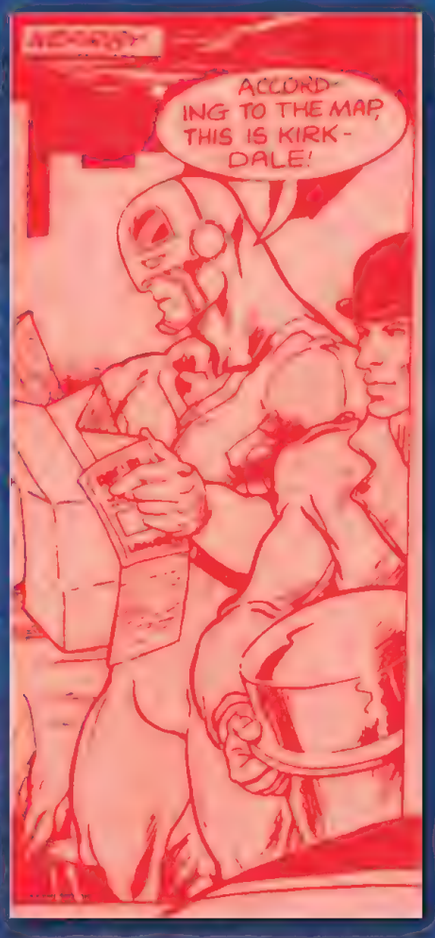
There was an even greater change of emphasis with the monthly line now overseen by new editor Dennis Jaye. Both Neary and Jaye had inherited Marvel Superheroes, by this point the dying gasp of the comic that had kick-started the whole British Marvel endeavour back in 1972. Running as a weekly for 352 issues the flagship title had suddenly morphed into a monthly in 1979, continuing the numbering under a new name. Offering little more than straight reprints of Avengers and Ms Marvel strips, the title would gradually evolve into something else entirely.

A new direction began for Marvel Superheroes No.373 marked the first of what was labelled the 'New Direction' monthlies. There were fanzine reviews by Neary along with new regular feature 'Inside Comics,' shedding light on life behind the scenes at Marvel UK and interviewing comics professionals such as artist David Lloyd. Crucially this new regular feature also gave Neary a platform to articulate his hopes going forward, which amounted to nothing less than a full blown Marvel UK Universe, separate and distinct from the American mothership. Neary compared the circumstances surrounding the (small) early 1960's US bullpen of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Don Heck et al. with the pool of UK talent then available such as Lloyd, Dave Gibbons, Steve Dillon and writer Steve Moore. Arguing both scenarios shared a similar starting point, he announced his own new 'back to basics' approach towards homegrown strips with a particular British slant with a promise to readers that 'interesting times are ahead.'

There was never really any doubt as to which character would lead the way into this brave new world. Neary was motivated into bringing Captain Britain back by the continuing popularity of a character despite (or perhaps in a typically British fashion because of) his continual poor treatment and plucky underdog status. If naturally garnering a great deal of affection among the UK readership, for many the original Captain Britain strips had left a lot to be desired. The origin story itself isn't without charm, yet the character very name seemed to come about for the wrong reasons. Entirely produced in the US, it quickly became apparent that everything was based on a US template. By the time Captain America showed up with the Red Skull the game was up. What followed was a slow, steady decline in storyline, art and reader interest with the title merging after 39 issues with Super Spiderman in 1977. Here the strip sank lower into the morass, the heady days of full colour with an excited young academic dashing around the garden in their cardboard Captain Britain masks all but forgotten. When the strip did finally disappear (after an actually half decent Spiderman team-up storyline) it seemed a mercy killing.

Neary himself was heavily involved with the look of the subsequent Steve Parkhouse/John Stokes Black Knight strip which had reintroduced the character in Hulk Weekly. The strip was certainly one of the better things to come out of the 1979 Revolution, yet despite Cap's major supporting role with a destiny finally under the aegis of a British creative team, the poor chap still seemed to remain filed under 'unfulfilled potential'. The logic behind the relaunch was obvious.

The new writer was to be Dave Thorpe, still fresh from joining the UK Bullpen as an assistant editor a year earlier. Armed with a degree in Dada and Surrealism, Thorpe's style would incorporate influences such as Lewis Carroll, HG Wells and John Wyndham, all of which fitted well with editorially imposed dictates such as the inclusion of elf sidekick Jackdaw and an alternate Earth



setting. Thorpe had even had his own fan letter printed way back in the weekly title, wondering 'what it means to be a Captain Britain.' He'd now have an opportunity to show just that, yet almost inevitably his handling of a character he'd describe as a 'muscle bound, upper class twit with a brain the size of a pea, draped in the Union Jack', coupled with a desire not to take everything too seriously would be at odds with an overly protective readership.

Alan Davis was another surprise choice for the art chores, especially after the lukewarm reception given to the cover of Marvel Action No.1. Following on from industry giants such as Herb Trimpe and John Buscema (even John Byrne had worked on the Cap/Spiderman team-up) Davis later gave huge credit to Neary at this early point of his career where he easily could have felt out of his depth. Still, he was bold enough to insist that he'd only be comfortable handling the character in a new costume, feeling him then to be more his own creation. Neary agreed and the new design became an immediate priority, with 'Inside Comics'

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showcasing some of the artists sketches prior to launch with a radically overhauled look incorporating military regalia. Neary also announced plans for the simultaneous launch in Rampage Magazine of a second homegrown strip, Timesmasher, with art from yet another newcomer, Mick Austin. The long term plan was to link the two strips at some future point, creating a more coherent British based Marvel Universe.

Appointing two new artists and one new writer certainly constituted a bold, fresh approach. Yet Neary seemed to be going further by drawing a line in the sand. He berated Marvel US for their 'patronising attempts to bring the superhero ethos to Britain' along with earlier Marvel UK leaderships for their 'acute lack of vision, (with) the chance to open a genuinely British corner of the Marvel Universe not taken.' Now, under a more 'thoughtful directive' Marvel UK would produce strips 'with the specific idea of suiting us first and America... second'. The fires had been well and truly stoked but the time for talk was over. Everyone would now be able to judge for themselves. With much enthusiasm, if little experience, Captain Britain and Timesmasher both made their debuts in their respective titles dated September 1981.

With both Davis (one paltry cover aside) and Thorpe making their mainstream comic debuts in Marvel Superheroes #377, it's remarkable in retrospect what they achieve in six meagre pages. A superb Davis cover (He's back. New art! New stories! New costume!) certainly whetted the appetite. Inside the reader is propelled straight into an action packed, surreal, off-kilter world with Cap and Jacklyn immediately faced by members of the Crazy Gang such as Mad Jim Jaspers, Coco the Clown and the Queen of Hearts. In the melee that follows Cap finds out that he can still fly despite the loss of his sceptre. By the end both new arrivals are left in no doubt that their hoped for return to Earth isn't quite what it seems.

For a variety of reasons this isn't an easy read, with an audience accustomed to the slick product of the US Marvel treadmill (such as the accompanying full-length Micheline/Byrne Avengers) undergoing complete culture shock. There's an absolute frenzied pace to proceedings as if making up for lost time. By only the second panel Cap's costume changes and his sceptre vanishes, both for no apparent reason. The noble attempts at capturing authentic speech patterns seem immediately jarring (Good Lord, a bank vault and if I'm not mistaken, those fellas are up to no good! - We've been tumbled! - Get 'im lads! - Get a load of this mate!) and the dialogue on the whole seems disjointed and oddly placed, like muffled echoes taking place after the event. At one point Cap states (seemingly out loud for everyone to hear) 'by sheer force of will I was able to slam him for six by extending the force field! Now I'd better take the fight outside.' The confusion is added to by the at-times indistinct art, with many panels feeling compressed and overrun with captions and word balloons. At certain points, including an extremely impressive first page, there's a genuine attempt at innovative panel design. The Queen of Hearts in particular the subject of one memorable depiction. Yet the strips flow is hard to follow, especially on first reading. By the end of page six with the whole surreal skirmish culminating in the Crazy Gang hot footing it away via a giant flying teapot my overall impression is 'just what the hell happened?'

Yet somehow, through the haze, there's something working here. The surreal nature of the storyline, the bizarre characters and their absurd situation all seem somehow complemented by the disjointed nature of the writing and art.

WHAT A STAGGERING CONCEPT IF I HADN'T HAD A TASTE OF THE STUFF MYSELF! I WOULDN'T GIVE THE SLIGHTEST CREDIT TO THIS WOMAN -
SATURNYNE AND HER DIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURT.

The Crazy Gang themselves (wholly described by one reader as a cross between Alice in Wonderland and the Ringmaster's Circus of Crime) are quite effective. Indeed, just as Neary had promised, here was something that only a British creative team would even dare to attempt, a psychedelic magical mystery tour with a nightmarish twist, complete with killer clowns and exploding teapots. This was not Marvel USA with your average 'good guy/bad guy' jam. This wasn't Captain America. This was Captain Britain, guv'nor.

The jury was out as to whether that amounted to anything worthwhile. Space was set aside for an expanded letters section to deal with the response. Readers often returned to similar themes with the low page count a particular bone of contention, yet the contents of those few pages seemed to be undergoing intense scrutiny. Some seemed partially on board with the strip's direction, with particular praise for Davis' cover and the new costume design. Others saw little worth in what they'd seen thus far (a flippant romp...a self parody) while some seemed to actually take offence (I shall stay silent no more...You dare to present us with tenth rate garbage that stinks!). Many reminded Thorpe of his own letter printed in 1977 about what it meant to be Captain Britain, wondering if he was up to the task of delivering on that.

Neary himself met all criticisms head on. Anyone comparing this new endeavour with the Captain Britain of the past was making a mistake. The short page count was entirely due to the budget restraints Marvel UK were forced to live under, with the higher page count for the US reprint material a necessary evil, for now at least. Crucially, he addressed some of the practical issues that the new creative team had faced, in particular the situation surrounding the art. Having initially been rendered by Davis on magazine sized boards instead of the usual oversized variety, the final product had needed major adjustments, with the cutting up and rearrangement of panels in order to accommodate the lettering. This went some way to explaining the cluttered look of the first few issues. However Neary remained bullish, determined to take the readership along with him even if it meant some had to be frog-marched; 'We're going for a more realistic feel and it's throwing a small percentage of readers who are tending to think in cliches...Hang on, pay attention and join us in our excursions into areas not yet entered into by Marvel USA'.

By No.380 there's still little in the way of character development with a storyline still veering towards the confusing (in addition to the Crazy Gang we'd been introduced to the 'Avant Guard' and were soon to meet the 'Status Crew'). Yet the strip is clearly coming together. Saturnyne (later to prominently feature in Alan Moore's storyline) makes her debut, mysteriously speaking of something called 'the Push'. As she'd later explain, she'd been dispatched to this most primitive of all the alternate earths' in the employ of the Dimensional Development Court to deploy the Push, designed to help the retarded world along in its evolutionary path as it was holding back all the other linked world's progress. The alternate-Earth concept was intriguing and one that would be used to great effect later by others. Thorpe was by now in control of the dialogue with his peculiar mix of the political and the surreal slowly coming together, despite a main protagonist still prone to come across as some square-jawed, ineffectual buffoon. Temporarily being turned into an ape probably didn't help matters.

Yet it's the artwork that was truly coming into its own now. Davis had nailed the feel of the strip as early as the third or fourth instalment. As each month went by it just looked better and better; finally here was something that not only held its own against the surrounding US reprints but arguably surpassed them. His glorious cover to No.382 alone a complete vindication of the team's original aim. Timesmasher may have been struggling to find a foothold over in Rampage Magazine but here in Captain Britain Marvel UK had proved that they could produce the goods. And

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THE PUSH MINUS THREE HOURS. AREN'T YOU COLD CAP'N?
MY FORCE FIELD ACTS AS DOUBLE GLAZING
SOON THE LIFE ENHANCING FLUID WILL BE PUT IN THE DRINK ING WATER OF ALL THE U.K TO-MORROW MORNING THE WHOLE NATION WILL RECIEVE AN EVOLUTIONARY KICK UP THE BACKSIDE WHEN THEY DRINK THEIR FIRST CUPPA!

It's at this very point where, for some, things fell apart.

There are varying accounts of just what happened next. Thorpe's writing had always contained a political edge, with the 'Push' itself highlighting wry social commentary and the earlier 'junk heap' episodes touching on environmental concerns among Britain at the time. He'd briefly introduced a young Afro-Caribbean character, shedding light on social division and poverty. Even the infamous fan letter from way back had talked of the need to avoid nationalism and wondered where Captain Britain himself would stand on the question of Northern Ireland. Now, years later, it was this particular political hot potato that would prove to be the breaking point.

It's important to put things into context. 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland had been steadily escalating, with the Provisional IRA's bombing campaign spilling over into mainland Britain. This was a highly sensitive time, one where even an innocuous pop culture artefact such as a music video by the band the Police (showing footage of life on the streets of Belfast with conflict between British troops and civilians) was getting banned by the BBC that autumn.

Thorpe's new storyline centred on a boy and a girl who are friends from either side of the religious divide not accepted by each others inner circle of friends and family. Captain Britain, for all his strength and power proves to be impotent in the face of the divisions, failing to stop the ensuing conflict. Almost inevitably, the storyline was objected to, both by Jaye in her position as editor and by Davis himself. Thorpe was asked for a rewrite.

What came back proved to be merely a thinly disguised variant, with Belfast now labeled 'Fablest' protestants now 'rottenplasts' and catholics 'coalitch'. Just in case the point was still missed, one set of the divide were 'orange growers' while the others were labelled 'potato growers'. Davis himself 'felt insulted that anyone might think I couldn't see through something so transparent. As bizarre as it may now sound, he was quite prepared to turn his back on the industry and concentrate on the day job driving fork lift trucks. Talk about bizarre alternate Earths. Editorial however sided with him. Some accounts state that Thorpe was sacked while others have him walking away, unwilling to change. Thorpe's own version has him (upon Neary and Jaye's request) continuing to submit new storylines, all of which were politely refused. Davis remembers the whole episode as 'the result of petty politics and very unpleasant'.

What's indisputable is that Jaye had Davis plot and draw a fill in story for No.385 with events set before the return from Otherworld, before a bastardised version of Thorpe's storyline, for which he received a writing credit, was finally published in No.386. With reference to sectarian conflict now replaced by mere warring neighbourhoods, it's hard to argue with Thorpe's assertion that the final product is anything other than bland. Yet historically it's of huge interest. Events, such as they are, get completely wrapped up by the final panel of page 4, with the fifth and final page later revealed to be Alan Moore's first work on the series, setting up his own forthcoming storyline. In all honesty you can see the join; in the space of a single page Moore has reintroduced an almost forgotten character from the first instalment, imbrued him with a disturbing new air of menace, then set about destroying the entire world. What followed is for another time, yet if Moore himself later recalled taking over a storyline he'd 'neither inaugurated nor completely understood', certain elements at least of what immediately follow owe a tiny debt to the (at times) imaginative preceding work.

Moore and Davis would go on to famously take the good Captain on to a whole new level, yet Neary's wish for a new dawn of British creativity opening up at Marvel UK wouldn't quite come to full fruition. Not quite yet. However, something was sparked into life back in September 1981, something well worth a revisit and re-evaluation, preferably over a nice piping-hot cup of tea. Stick the kettle on, old sport!

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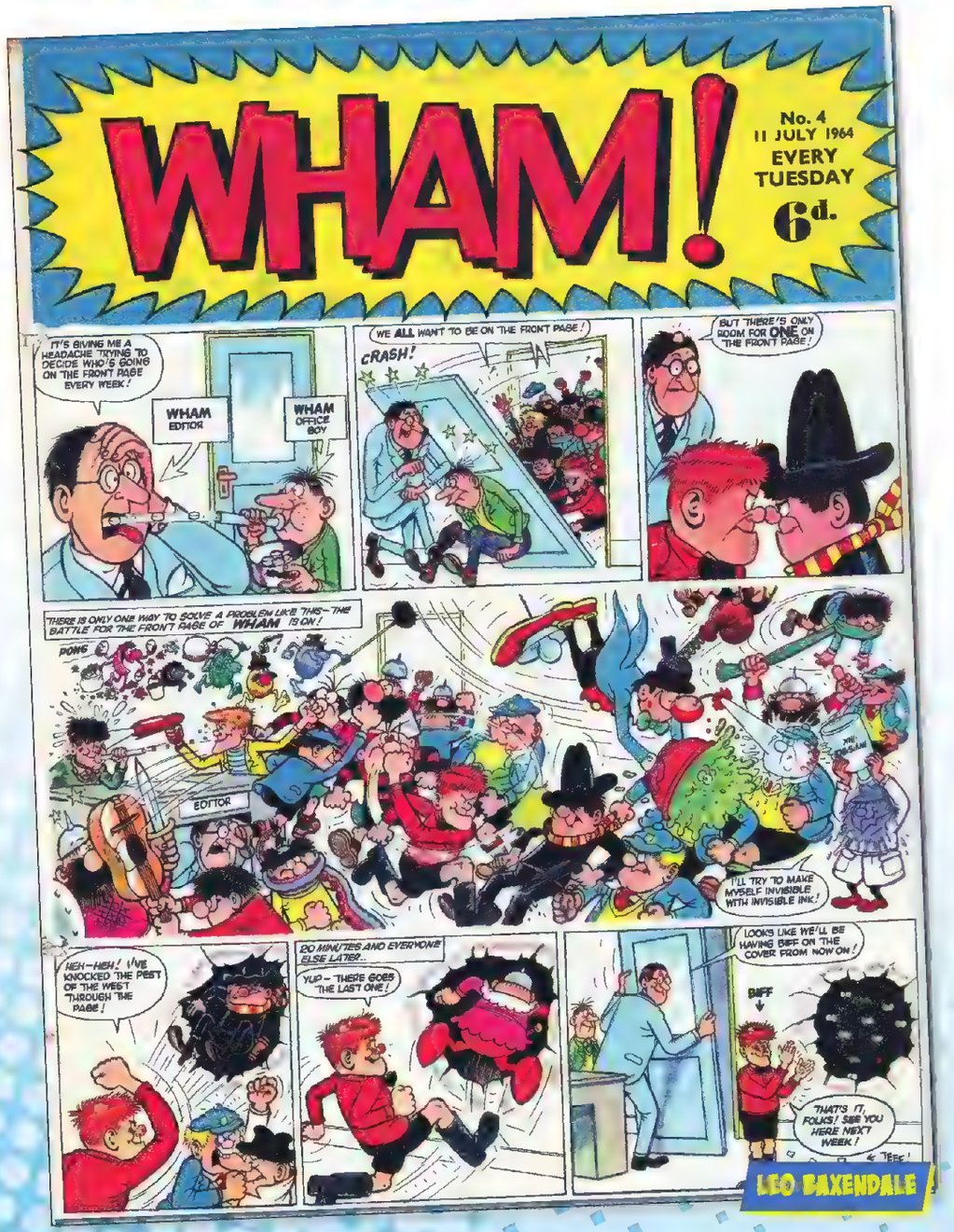
CORKER!

Great Comics for all our readers

THE GREAT COMIC SCENE FREE COMIC

GAMECHANGERS OF THE FUNNIES

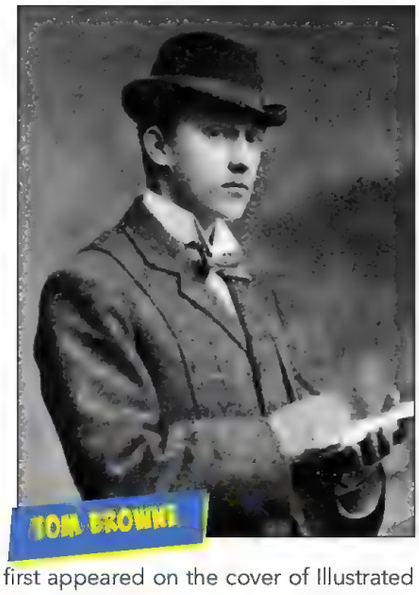

WHAM!
No. 4
11 JULY 1964
EVERY TUESDAY
6d.
IT'S GIVING ME A HEADACHE TRYING TO DECIDE WHO'S GOING ON THE FRONT PAGE EVERY WEEK!
WHAM EDITOR
WHAM OFFICE BOY
WE ALL WANT TO BE ON THE FRONT PAGE!
CRASH!
BUT THERE'S ONLY ROOM FOR ONE ON THE FRONT PAGE!
THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE THIS—THE BATTLE FOR THE FRONT PAGE OF WHAM IS ON!
PONG
EDITOR
I'LL TRY TO MAKE MYSELF INVISIBLE WITH INVISIBLE INK!
HEH-HEH! I'VE KNOCKED THE PEST OF THE WEST THROUGH THE PAGE!
20 MINUTES AND EVERYONE ELSE LATER...
YUP - THERE GOES THE LAST ONE!
LOOKS LIKE WE'LL BE HAVING BIFF ON THE COVER FROM NOW ON!
BIFF
THAT'S IT, FOLKS! SEE YOU HERE NEXT WEEK!
TEE HEE!
LEO BAXENDALE

Anyone who's read British humour comics will have their favourite artists, and they're usually the ones who drew the stories and characters we grew up with, but the whole history of comics is worth looking into. After all, it was the pioneers of comics, and the creators from before our time, which shaped the direction of the medium we appreciate so much.

The origins of British comics can be traced back to the 19th Century and titles such as Funny Folks and Ally Sloper's Half Holiday, but today I just want to focus on a few of the key artists who were game-changers in the history of humour comics.

Tom Browne (1870 – 1910) brought techniques to comics that are still being used by comic artists today. The accepted norm was for fine rendering and cross-hatching but that wasn't always appropriate for the cheap standard of printing that the early comic papers used. Browne developed a simpler but nonetheless detailed style of solid blacks and bolder lines. His drawings also had a lively amount of chaotic slapstick comedy to them; themes that would become the traditional standard of British humour comics.

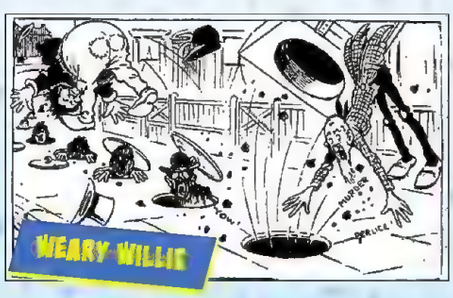
Browne was a famous artist in his own right but his most enduring creations for the comics were two tramps named Weary Waddles and Tired Timmy, (later evolving into Weary Willie and Tired Tim) who



first appeared on the cover of Illustrated Chips in 1896. They impressed the editor G.H. Cantle so much that he asked Browne to continue them as a regular feature. It became one of the most popular strips in British comics, (drawn from 1909 to 1953 by Percy Cocking) and ran for 57 years until the final issue of Chips in 1953.

If Tom Bowne set the ball rolling for the traditional UK humour comic it was Roy Wilson (1900 – 1965) who refined it. Wilson had been an assistant to Don Newhouse, and adopted his technique, bringing a true sense of fun and joy to his strips. His skills arguably exceeded those of his mentor, and Wilson became the leading artist at Amalgamated Press on weeklies such as The Funny Wonder and Golden. Other artists were encouraged to closely mimic his style, - and they accomplished it so well that it was not always easy to tell the difference between Wilson and his many imitators, not helped by the publisher's insistence that they remained anonymous. One of those artists, Reg Parlett, became one of the most prolific creators in UK comics, with a career lasting over 60 years.

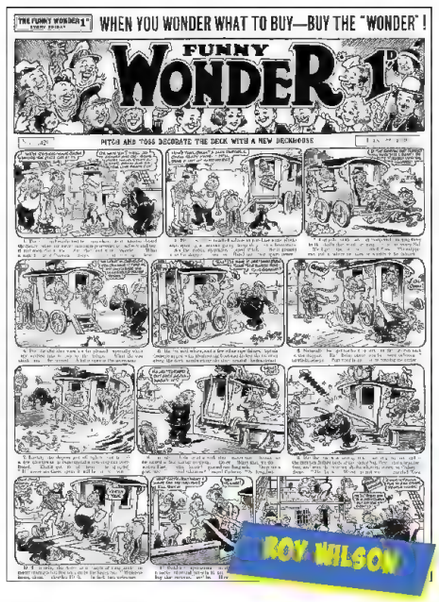
London-based Amalgamated Press dominated the British comics scene in the 1930s, with the style of Roy Wilson and his imitators defining the look of humour comics. However, the status quo was shaken up when two rivals emerged from North of the border in the form of D.C. Thomson's Dandy (1937) and Beano (1938). The newcomers had a more robust style to them compared to the relatively clean-cut A.P. comics, thanks to artists such as Dudley D. Watkins (1907 – 1969). Strips such as Desperate Dan and Lord Snooty and his Pals had a somewhat more brutal aspect to the humour that suited the times, immediately making the A.P. comics look very old-fashioned indeed.



This edge that the D.C. Thomson comics had to their stories was amplified even more with the arrival of Dennis the Menace in The Beano in 1951. With artwork by Davy Law, Dennis was a sullen anti-hero, relishing in his misdeeds (albeit it leading to inevitable punishment). The template for the "naughty kid character" was established and would influence the direction of humour comics for the next several decades. Davy Law's approach to drawing had stripped the traditional humour style down to its basics. Far less ornate than Roy Wilson's, it had a stark impact and directness to it. Law's strip came to the attention of a young cartoonist named Leo Baxendale (1930 – 2017) who was inspired enough to submit his own pages to The Beano, leading to the creation of Little Plum (Your now non-PC Redskin Chum), The Three Bears, and of course The Bash Street Kids.

Like Roy Wilson before him, Leo Baxendale's style became the one that other artists were encouraged to imitate, especially after he quit D.C. Thomson in 1962, necessitating other artists such as David Sutherland and Ron Spencer to "ghost" his style. Baxendale had taken up an offer by Odhams to create a comic for them, and Wham! was born, launched in 1964. Even the prolific Leo Baxendale couldn't handle all the pages in one comic though, and others such as Stan McMurtry, Mike Lacey, and Graham Allen were commissioned to follow Leo's technique there too. Subsequently, Leo's influence on British humour comics was considerable.

Leo quit mainstream comics altogether in 1975, dismayed at IPC's practice of reprinting numerous strips by him and many others without payment. By that time his style had evolved into a more shorthand technique, - but was still immensely funny. A young cartoonist named Tom Paterson



took over Leo's Sweeny Toddler strip in Whoopee! and made that style his own. Tom went on to draw many strips over the years in that style, which is now more associated with Tom than Leo!

A honorary mention here to the great Ken Reid (1919 – 1987), whose detailed, uniquely manic technique never became a "house style" for any company but he certainly enriched British comics with strips such as Jonah for The Beano and Frankie Stein for Wham!

These days, in the few mainstream British comics that survive, publishers tend to let artists develop their own styles. On The Phoenix for example, variety is the spice of life, with radically differing art from people such as Jamie Smart, James Turner, and Jessica Bradley-Bove. Over the past 100 years or more, the style of British humour comic art has evolved and become more streamlined, but they key ingredient remains the same; *comics are still funny!*

Author: Lew Stringer | **Twitter:** @lewstringer | **Website:** lewstringer.com

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WHACKOMAN!

BY MARC JACKSON

LAST TIME... WHACKOMAN DRAGGED BUGSY OFF A ROOF IN AN ATTEMPT TO PUT SUPER-HERO HAIRS ON HIS CHEST. IT DIDN'T WORK...

WHILST MY GLAMOUROUS SIDE-KICK BUGSY IS STILL CONVALESCING IN TRACTION, IT'S UP TO ME TO KEEP AN EXTRA-KEEN EYE ON CRIME!
COFFEE

NONE FOR ME, YOUNG MAN! SUGAR IS FOR WEAK-MINDED SIMPLETONS!
I NEED TO BE FOCUSSED! NOT DISTRACTED BY THE NECTAR OF THE NINCOMPOOP!
SHOO! SHOO!

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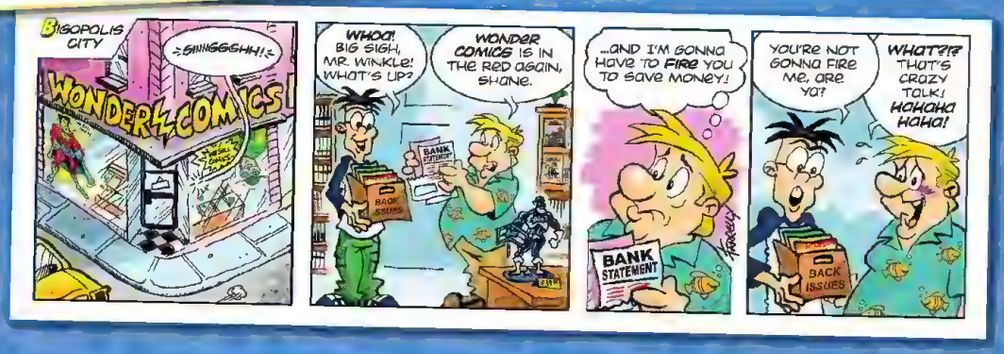
CAPTAIN WONDER

CAPTAIN WONDER

BY JOHN FARRELLY


BIGOPOLIS CITY
:-SIIIIIGGHH!-:
WONDER COMICS
WHOA! BIG SIGH, MR. WINKLE! WHAT'S UP?
WONDER COMICS IS IN THE RED AGAIN, SHANE.
BANK STATEMENT
BACK ISSUES
...AND I'M GONNA HAVE TO FIRE YOU TO SAVE MONEY!
BANK STATEMENT
YOU'RE NOT GONNA FIRE ME, ARE YA?
WHAT?!? THAT'S CRAZY TALK! HAHAHA HAHA!
BACK ISSUES

I'VE GOT TO TELL SHANE HE'S FIRED! I HAVE TO BE STRONG!
JUST TELL HIM "SHANE - I CAN'T AFFORD TO PAY YOU - YOU'RE FIRED." BE STRONG, CHARLEY, BE STRONG!
MR. WINKLE, WHERE ARE -
HAVE A $100 BONUS, SHANE!
I CAN'T BELIEVE I WENT TO FIRE SHANE THEN ENDED UP GIVING HIM $100!
BACK ISSUES
I JUST GOTTA TELL HIM STRAIGHT!
BACK ISSUES
SHANE - I HAVE TO LET YOU GO.
A $100 BONUS AND THE AFTERNOON OFF! YOU'RE THE GREATEST, MR. W!
SHANE I HAVE TO FUH...FUH... FUH...
"FIRE YOU!" SAY IT!
YOU ALL RIGHT, MR. W?
FUH...FUH... FUH...
"FIRE YOU!" SAY IT! SAY IT!
YOU WANT A GLASS OF WATER?
FUH...FUH...
"FIYURR YOOOU!!"
MR. W?
FUH... FIND A WAY OF SAVING MONEY!
WELL, YOU COULD ALWAYS JUST FIRE ME!
SHANE ARE YOU SAYING YOU DON'T MIND BEING FIRED?
NAW - I GOT SOME MONEY PUT AWAY. I JUST WORK HERE FOR FUN!
THEN YOU'RE... UH...YOU'RE FIRED.
YOU %@*$#!! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?!!
I'M NOT GONNA FIRE YOU SHANE. THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER WAY TO SAVE MONEY!
PITY WE DON'T HAVE OUR OWN SUPERHERO TO SAVE US, HUH MR. W?
MR. W? MR. W?
IT'S BRILLIANT! IN THE FINEST SUPERHERO TRADITION, I MAKE MY OWN COSTUME...
...THEN USE IT TO GENERATE PUBLICITY TO SAVE WONDER COMICS FROM GOING BUST!
HELLO? EDDIE'S OUTFITS!
COSTUMES MADE TO ORDER

THIS IS THE PLACE!
EDDIE'S OUTFITS
OPEN
WAIT - IF I'M TO BE A SUPERHERO THEN I CAN'T BE IDENTIFIED BY CLOTHING, HAIR COLOR, FINGERPRINTS...
I'M THE GUY WHO CALLED ABOUT THE SUPERHERO COSTUME.
THAT WAS GONNA BE MY NEXT GUESS.
NAH - IT'S NOT THE LOOK I'M AFTER.
TOO GAUDY!
TOO LEATHERY!
TOO SPANGLY!
TOO FLASHY!
NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!
THIS IS MORE THAN JUST A COSTUME, Y'KNOW!
COSTUMES MADE TO ORDER
IT'S A SYMBOL - FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE AND LIBERTY! A BEACON OF LIGHT IN A HARSH AND CRUEL WORLD! AN EMBLEM OF HOPE IN AN UNCARING UNIVERSE!
BILL
EIGHT HUNDRED BUCKS!? FOR A PIECE OF CLOTH?!!
CASH OR CHARGE?
CHARGE. I DON'T HAVE $800 ON ME.
COSTUMES MADE TO ORDER
NNGGH! MY CREDIT CARD'S GOT MY REAL NAME ON IT! I CAN'T PAY WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING MY SECRET IDENTITY!
"...AND I SOLEMNLY SWEAR NOT TO REVEAL..."
"...AND I SOLEMNLY SWEAR NOT TO REVEAL..."
UH-OH! IT'S MY NEIGHBORS HAMM AND PATTY! TIME TO TEST MY DISGUISE!
GOOD EVENING, CITIZENS!
UH... HI.
HA HA! THEY DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ME! WHAT A GREAT COSTUME!
WASN'T THAT CHARLEY WINKLE? MUST BE GOING TO A PARTY.
LOUSY COSTUME.
MUSTN'T LET SHANE KNOW I'M REALLY HIS BOSS!
GOOD DAY, CITIZEN!
WONDER COMICS
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM CAPTAIN WONDER! COME TO SAVE WONDER COMICS FROM BANKRUPTCY!
BIRDPOLICE 01
COOL! DO YOU NEED A TEENAGE SIDEKICK?
SHANE - YOU'RE 22!
WOW! HOW'D YOU KNOW THAT? HOW'D YOU KNOW MY NAME?
ER...UM...UH TELEPATHIC POWERS, SON! HEH HEH!

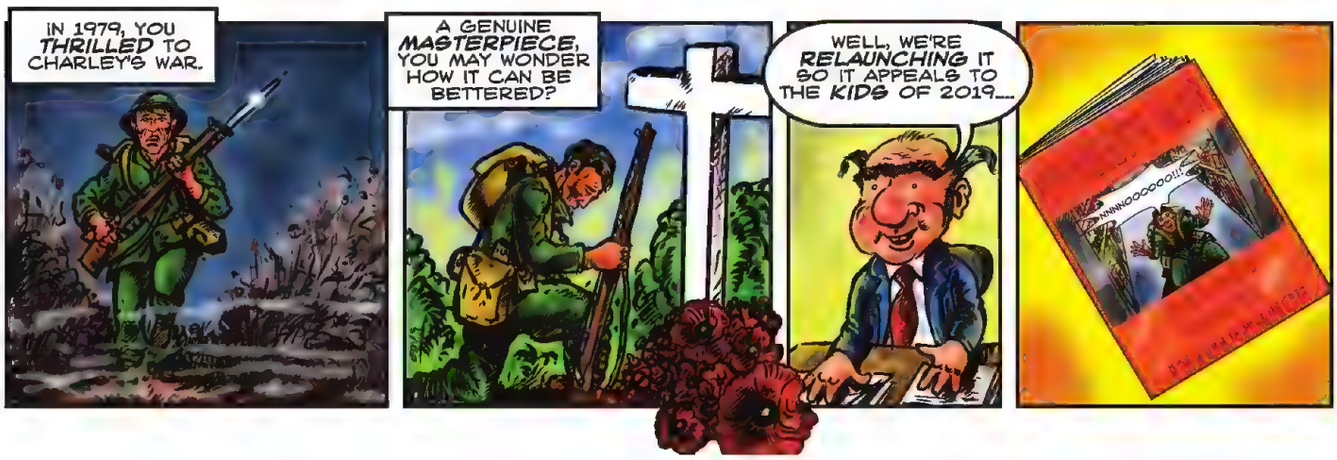
The ZYGON's

Written and Drawn by Jim Wilkins

THE PUB.
BACK IN THE DAY WE USED TO INVADE PLANETS, ASSIMILATE AND CONQUER. NOW WHAT DO WE DO ?
WE GET TO HAVE QUIET NIGHTS DOWN THE PUB AS MIDDLE AGED MONSTERS AND GO HOME TO OUR FAMILIES.
SPEAK FOR YOURSELVES, I'D STILL LIKE TO ANNIHILATE YOU ALL!

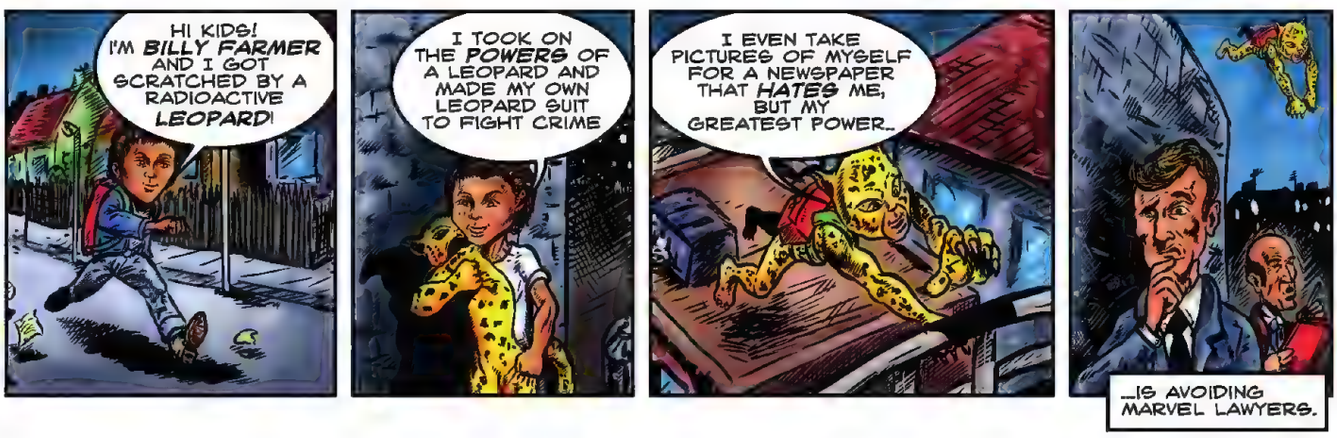
SCENE IT BEFORE: WAR IS HELL

SCRIPT: ALAN HOLLOWAY
ART: ED DOYLE


IN 1979, YOU THRILLED TO CHARLEY'S WAR.
A GENUINE MASTERPIECE, YOU MAY WONDER HOW IT CAN BE BETTERED?
WELL, WE'RE RELAUNCHING IT SO IT APPEALS TO THE KIDS OF 2019....
NNNNOOOOOO!!!

SCENE IT BEFORE: LEOPARD LITIGATION

SCRIPT: ALAN HOLLOWAY
ART: ED DOYLE


HI KIDS! I'M BILLY FARMER AND I GOT SCRATCHED BY A RADIOACTIVE LEOPARD!
I TOOK ON THE POWERS OF A LEOPARD AND MADE MY OWN LEOPARD SUIT TO FIGHT CRIME
I EVEN TAKE PICTURES OF MYSELF FOR A NEWSPAPER THAT HATES ME, BUT MY GREATEST POWER...
...IS AVOIDING MARVEL LAWYERS.

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I'm Chris Baker, I have a writing partner called Matt Fitch and together we just get on with it and never apologise. We write many things but comics just has that magic you can't find in other mediums. We've worked in advertising all our adult lives and believe me, the perks are fantastic but you seldom get to do it 100% your way. This is why we both decided to write comics. Unlike a new Spider-man movie reboot, I'm not going to give you our origin story again. Right now I'm writing this... call it an introduction/caveat to give you a little insight to why, how and when our new webcomic, OUR LAND, came to be. We dedicate the story to the reflection of Angus Mayer.

Our Land was something Matt and I had dreamt up way-back in our Dead Canary Comics days when we were coming up with short story ideas for the Adventures in Science anthology. The concept was simple: what if Native Americans had found the Roswell crash site first? (Why is it the best comics usually have a "what if" in the pitch top line?)

The story focuses on a native American brother and sister living in 1940's New Mexico, dealing with the racism and hardships of the time, until a twist of fate brings an Alien spacecraft down in their proverbial backyard and Dena, the younger hot-head brother is endowed with mysterious Alien abilities. What follows is an alternative history tale of a war that might have been, a race against time to stop a new Army of unstoppable Native American fanatics driving the 'White Man' back to the sea. America's only hope rests with Dena's Deputy Sheriff sister, Kasa, and her Sheriff's Office colleagues.

We took a little pause on new material late last year. Apollo was released, job done, and was gaining traction. We were being asked to attend cons and give talks on space exploration, non-fiction research methods and so on. But even as we were promoting Apollo we were thinking about the next thing and

we knew that the best way to keep yourself current and alive in the very small comic book community is to have material released on a regular basis. But we can't bring a Graphic Novel to life on a monthly basis!

So for our follow-up to Apollo, we figured why not do something completely different? After the factual history book we wanted to do something fun and a little… crazy. So we took a look in our notebooks, dusted off the Our Land concept and started developing it into a full length story. Part of the allure of comics is that what you essentially have is a medium that's so rustic and pure it can be anything you dream. The writer needs to be the architect of that product. There's no space for information wasted, every page is a chance to communicate with your reader from cover to credits. This is just how Matt and I work. We've done commercials for a long time, we know how to slip in the secret meaning and the subliminal ideas.

The artist on Our Land, J (Joe) Francis Totti had been introduced to me through Matt. These guys had done a crazy little short together and Joe's art was very promising, so I asked him if he'd draw my contribution to SelfMadeHero's 'The Corbyn Comic'. Totti was everything I needed in a collaborator; talented, inventive, fast and professional, plus he looked like he could handle himself in a scuffle if the situation fell apart. It was in Leeds that we three sat with mixed drinks talking about Roswell and Indians. Despite the vast scope of the story - 1940s military fighting a horde of Native American warriors, giant eagles swooping down on the White house, and a huge bastard battle on an alien homeworld - Joe listened calmly to our shit show of ideas designed to send an artist insane and simply said: "I'll draw this"... maybe it was the alcohol or the cold Northern air, but a deal was struck.

But why a webcomic? Some people may say it's a step backwards after a best-selling hardback graphic novel. Our motto at present is 'Do what you want to do', create something for yourself, don't always write what you think people want to read. You'll end up hating yourself. Our Land was something Matt, Joe and I were unwilling to make concessions on. It had to be the way it was in the script. So we are putting it out for free through Dead Canary Comics. No catch, just a free comic we want you to read. The idea of a webcomic excites us. As much we love 'real' comics, there's no denying the future of the medium is, at least partly, digital. Releasing Our Land as a webcomic means we can unfold the story over a series of months and readers can give us instant feedback. So, call us crazy, but despite a handful of interesting offers from publishers, this particular story is going digital-first. After all, we started creating comics precisely because we wanted to break free of a restrictive environment.

So sit back, pour another glass of whatever that stuff is you're drinking, draw the curtains, bolt the door and switch the radio station to Americana. We give you our great big American 'What If?'... We give you OUR LAND.

Read the strip online at ourlandcomic.co.uk

"Our Land was something Matt and I had **dreamt up** way-back in our **Dead Canary Comics** days"

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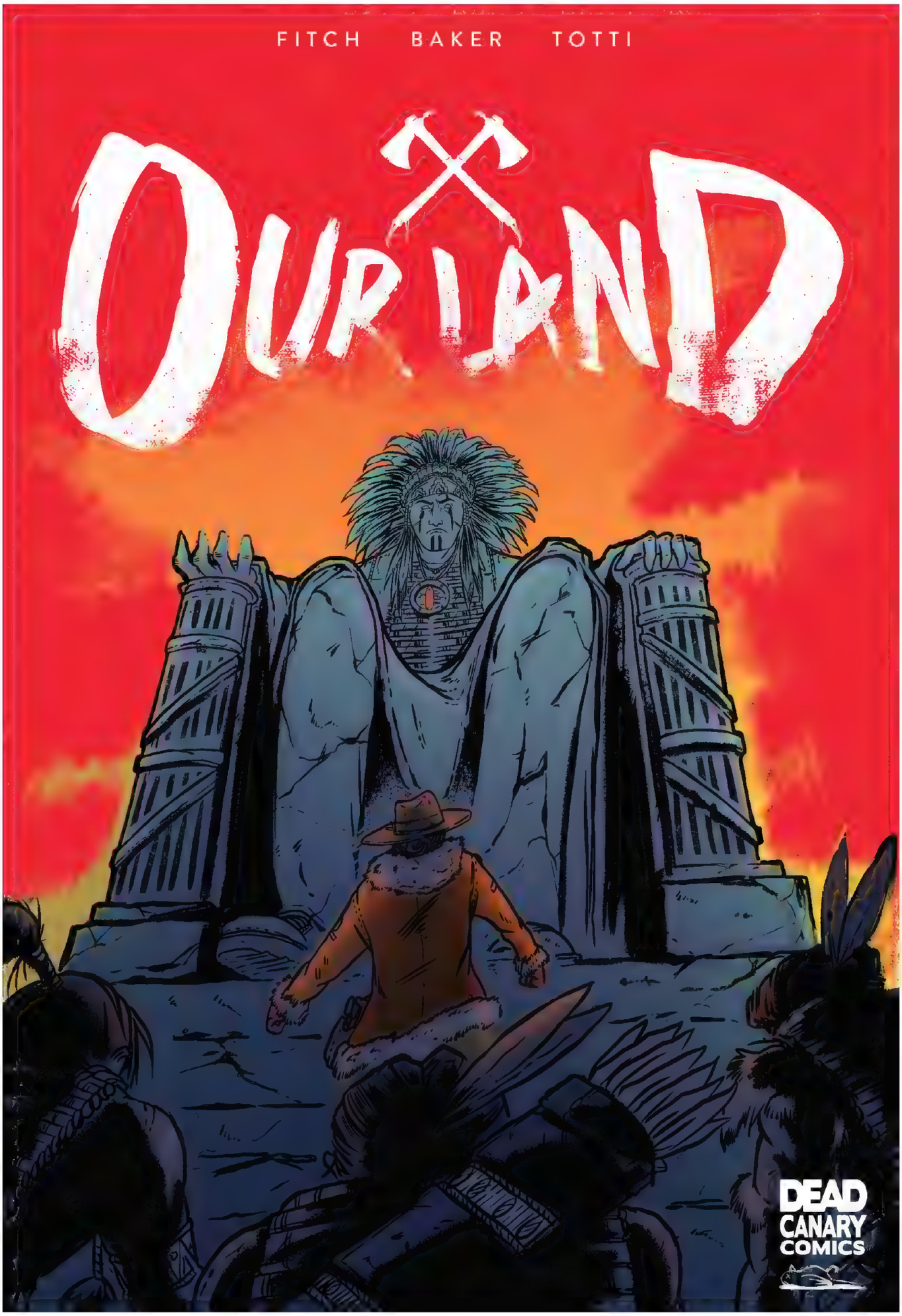

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Lincoln County
New Mexico
1947
NOW WHAT'D I TELL YOU 'BOUT COMING 'ROUND HERE, SCOUT?
DIDN'T I SAY I'D HAND YOU BACK YOUR DIRTY SKINNED-ASS TA HOLD AS I KICKED IT OUTTA THAT THERE WINDA?
AND I SAID I'D DO MY DRINKING WHERE I PLEASED.

YOU GOT YOU A SMART MOUTH ON A DUMB HEAD TONTO.
HEAR THAT, BOY? THAT BIG SISTER YOU GOT GONNA PUT ME IN HANDCUFFS? SPANK ME WITH THEM BRAIDS?
NOW CARL, IMMA HAVE TA CALL THE SHERIFF IF THIS GETS OUTTA HAND.

DENA, DENA...?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HAAAWWW...

DENA, COME ON, MAN...
SHE BRAID HER KOOCH HAIR TOO?
HA!

YOU WHITE TRASH PIECE OF...!

YOU CAN CALL THE SHERIFF NOW, ZEB

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THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I'VE BEEN OUT HERE THIS WEEK, MRS O' REILLY. DIDN'T I SAY TO CALL ME IF THAT COYOTE CAME BACK?
BUT PLEASE.. NO MORE SHOOTING, OK? YOU'RE LUCKY IT WAS JUST THE GORDON'S MAILBOX YOU HIT AND NOT ONE OF THEIR KIDS.
NOW, I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE YOUR GUN AWAY THIS TIME..
DAMN RIGHT YA AIN'T!
DANG OL' SUMBITCH WAS IN MA COOP! HELPED HIMSELF TA FOUR CHICKENS. FOUR!
I UNDERSTAND MRS O' REILLY. I'LL HAVE ANIMAL CONTROL LAY SOME MORE TRAPS.
..BUT MAYBE YOU SHOULD LET ME HAVE THE REST OF THOSE SHELLS.
KSCHHHH.. KASA.. KSCHHHH.. KASA, COME IN.. KSCHHHH..
GO AHEAD SHERIFF. WHAT IS IT?
KSCHHHH.. KASA, I'VE GOT DENA HERE WITH ME..
KSCHHHH.. KID GOT HIMSELF INTO A LITTLE TROUBLE OVER AT MOONEYS...
KSCHHHH... BETTER HEAD ON HOME, I'LL MEET YA THERE. OVER.. KSCHHHH..
ROGER THAT, SHERIFF.

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MESCALERO INDIAN RESERVATION.
KID'S GOT SPIRIT, I'LL GIVE 'IM THAT. WENT DOWN FIGHTIN' LIKE A WILDCAT 'CORDING TA ZED.
IM SO SORRY, SHERIFF I'LL TALK TO HIM..
NO NEED TA APOLOGISE, KASA, WEREN'T YOU OUT THERE THROWING PUNCHES AT CARL COLSON.. THOUGH IM SURE YA'D LIKE TA.
THE THOUGHT HAS CROSSED MY MIND.
PRETTY SURE IT'S CROSSED EVERY MIND IN LINCOLN ONE TIME OR 'NOTHER.
WELL, RECKON I'LL BE ON MA WAY, KASA. WOULDN'T WANNA OUT STAY MA WELCOME.
I'LL SEE YA IN THE MORNING, BRIGHT AN' EARLY.
GOODNIGHT, SHERIFF AND SORRY AGAIN.
SORRY'S FER SINNERS N' SUCKERS.
YOU THINK DADDY WOULD BE PROUD OF YOU, ACTING LIKE THIS?
PROUDER THAN HE WOULD BE OF YOU, RUNNIN' ROUND TOWN LIKE SOME HONORARY WHITE GIRL.

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YOU MIGHT WEAR THAT BADGE, KASA, BUT YOU'RE NO DEPUTY. NOBODY IN TOWN RESPECTS YOU AND HALF THE RESERVATION WON'T TALK TO YOU BECAUSE YOU WORK FOR THEM.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE.
WELL IT'S BETTER THAN FIGHTING IN BARS WITH TRASH! YOU'RE BITTER OVER SOMETHING YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE.
LEAST I'M TRYING.
ALRIGHT, DENA, DO IT YOUR WAY. KEEP GETTING YOUR ASS KICKED, SEE IF IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.
LIFE'S NOT FAIR, THE SOONER YOU REALISE THAT...
I DO REALISE IT, KASA! DON'T YOU GET IT? I REALISE IT AND IT DRIVES ME CRAZY!
DENA... I LOVE YOU...
I JUST WANT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU.
THEN STOP TAKING THEIR
DAMN SIDE.

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tripwire presents

Welcome to the latest Tripwire Presents TV and Film section of Comic Scene UK. Each issue we shall be offering the best in TV and film coverage in the pages of the magazine. This time around, it starts with a history of Batman on TV and in films in this, the character's 80th anniversary year...

Happy 80th Birthday Dark Knight Detective

2019 is the 80th anniversary of Batman and here JOEL MEADOWS takes a look at the various permutations of the Dark Knight on the small and big screen over the years...

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Batman, who along with Superman and Wonder Woman, is arguably the most iconic and recognisable comic character still being published. Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics* 27, which was published in March 1939 and it didn't take long for him to make the leap form the printed page to the screen. Four years after the character made his print debut, Lewis Wilson starred in Columbia Pictures' *Batman* movie in 1943 with Douglas Croft as Robin. Fast-forward six years and we have *Batman and Robin*, a movie serial starring Robert Lowery as Batman/ Bruce Wayne and John Duncan as Robin/ Dick Grayson. It was originally created as a 15 part serial.

After these two films, the 1950s was a sparse period for Batman on the screen but this was more than made up for with the Adam West and Burt Ward series of the 1960s. Running from 1966 to 1968 with a movie spin-off, *Batman*, in 1966, West and Ward's series was a huge hit and catapulted the character into the stratosphere.

After 1968, there was another big gap with the next Batman movie appearing in the shape of Tim Burton's *Batman* just over twenty years later in 1989. However, it triggered another spike in interest in the character with three increasingly weak sequels (*Batman Returns*, *Batman Forever* and *Batman & Robin*). Michael Keaton starred as the Dark Knight in the two Burton films (Batman and Batman Returns (1992)) while Val Kilmer starred in *Batman Forever* (1995) and George Clooney buried the franchise temporarily in *Batman & Robin* in 1997. Burton's approach, modern gothic, was refreshing but by the time his replacement director Joel Schumacher stepped in for the last two films, quality had dropped like a batarang into the river. The box office for *Batman* was $250m while the box office performance was inconsistent for each progressive film: *Batman Returns* grossed $266m, *Batman Forever* took $336m and *Batman & Robin* took a disappointing $238m at the box office.

"Four years after the character made his print debut, Lewis Wilson starred in Columbia Pictures' Batman movie in 1943 with Douglas Croft as Robin"

At the same time as the second Batman film, *Batman The Animated Series* debuted in 1992. This was a more

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ran until 1995. It proved that animation could tackle more complicated concepts than it had done and thanks to the creators Bruce Timm and Paul Dini and Kevin Conroy, who was the voice of Batman, *Batman: The Animated Series* is still considered one of the finest adaptations of Finger, Kane and Robinson's creations ever to grace the small or big screen. As well as the clever writing and sophisticated animation, the voice talents of Kevin Conroy as Batman/ Bruce Wayne and Mark Hamill as The Joker meant that this is a truly memorable portrayal of the Dark Knight.

So the poor performance of *Batman & Robin* in 1997 led to another gap. It would be another eight years until the Dark Knight returned to the big screen. Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* recast Bruce Wayne/ Batman with Christian Bale in the title role with Liam Neeson as villain Ra's Al Ghul. It was a moderate success, grossing $206m at the box office, wiping away the bad taste that the Schumacher films had left. Three years later in 2008, *The Dark Knight* was released. Starring the late Heath Ledger as The Joker, it engaged with audiences and grossed a whopping $533m at the box office. Batman was definitely back.

Four years later, the third and final Nolan Batman film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, was released. Tom Hardy played villain Bane and despite an overlong running time, it made a huge splash, grossing over $1bn at the box office.

"Three years later in 2008, The Dark Knight was released. Starring the late Heath Ledger as The Joker, it engaged with audiences and grossed a whopping $533m at the box office."

After Nolan's trilogy, the character returned to the wilderness for a number of years. It was still used in a number of DC Animated movies like *Batman: Under The Red Hood* (2010), *Superman/ Batman: Apocalypse* (2010) and *Batman: Year One* (2011) but he didn't come back to live action until Batman vs *Superman: Dawn Of Justice* in 2016. Now with Ben Affleck in the title role, this split audiences and critics, taking $828m at the box office. The film, now part of the DC Extended Universe, led to a *Justice League* film released in 2017 but that disappointed at the box office, grossing just $658m.

The character also appeared in the *Lego Batman* movie too in 2017, which made a very respectable $312m at the box office.

It has been seven years since Batman featured in a livescreen solo adventure on the big screen and DC has confirmed that a standalone Batman film is still in the works for release in 2021 with *Planet of The Apes* reboot director Matt

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Reeves attached. However, [illegible] is gone as Batman and so speculation has begun again as to who will replace him. I have no extra insights into who will don the cape this time but names like Jake Gyllenhaal, *Game of Thrones'* Kit Harington and even Jon Hamm have been thrown around as possible replacements. We don't know what sort of approach Reeves will take and that will remain fluid until he picks his Batman. But he is an interesting director and he brought something fresh and new to *Planet Of The Apes* so it is likely he will do so [illegible] with the standalone [illegible].

At the same time, TV [illegible] books at the genesis of Batman and his villains, is ending this year. It's not as popular as it was when it started but it has kept elements of the Bat [illegible] when he was off the [illegible].

"Batman has been a regular fixture in the comics and on the big and small screen for decades and there is no reason to think this will change for the foreseeable future."

The Batman animated films have also continued with the latest one adapting Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's *Hush*, out this year.

One thing is certain though: Batman has been a regular fixture in the comics and on the big and small screen for decades and there is no reason to think this will change for the foreseeable future. Happy 80th birthday Dark Knight Detective and here's to another 80 years.

DC will [illegible] Detective [illegible].

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tripwire
presents

Hell Of A Comeback?

Hellboy hasn't been on the big screen since _Hellboy: The Golden Army_ back in 2008. So cam new director Neil Marshall and new star David Harbour breathe new cinematic life into Mike Mignola's most famous creation. JOEL MEADOWS takes a look at its genesis and asks if this could engage with audiences...

The last Hellboy film directed by Guillermo del Toro and starring Ron Pearlman as the eponymous hero, *Hellboy: The Golden Army* came out eleven years ago in 2008. Since then, there have been rumours of a third film. Both director del Toro and star Pearlman have expressed interest in returning one more time to Mignola's character.

However, when del Toro was not offered the director's chair for a third time, Pearlman wouldn't come back without del Toro's involvement. So in 2017, it was announced that Hellboy would be getting a reboot with a new director and new star.

The film was originally called *Hellboy: Rise Of The Blood Queen but it was retitled as just Hellboy.*

Director Neil Marshall is a British director who started his career making low budget horror movies like Dog Soldiers and The Descent but parlayed this into a CV that now includes stints directing episodes of TV shows like *Game of Thrones*, *Westworld* and *Hannibal*. David Harbour who plays the new Hellboy is probably best known as sheriff Jim Hopper in two seasons of Netflix's huge *Stranger Things*.

Some of the rest of the cast has decent pedigree too: Milla Jovovich (*Fifth Element*) plays Nimue the Queen of Blood. A powerful and ancient medieval British sorceress who seeks to destroy mankind. Harbour had stated that Hellboy has a "very special relationship" with Nimue and that her role is further expanded on in the film. Legend Ian McShane is Hellboy's adopted father Trevor Bruttenholm, who also heads up the BPRD. The other cast members are less well known although Daniel Dae Kim, who plays Ben Daimo, is probably best known for his work in the Divergent movie series.

"I got into the Hellboy graphic novels in my 20s because they were recommended to me by a friend who was really into graphic novels."– David Harbour

Harbour talked extensively about his approach to Hellboy in an interview with CNET last November.

"I liked comic books when I was a kid, but I was much more of a video game guy. But I got into the Hellboy graphic novels in my 20s because they were recommended to me by a friend who was really into graphic novels."

The Hellboy comics connected with the actor:

Hell To Pay: David Harbour Is Hellboy (left) while Hellboy hangs out with Alice Monaghan (Sacha Lane) and Ben Daimo (Daniel Dae Kim) in London

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"I thought they were gorgeous and really interesting – this world of demons and devils, weird old folktales like Baba Yaga, and characters that just emerge from these weird disparate mythologies that come together in this Hellboy universe.

I like that because it has an alphabet that we understand, but it's put together in new ways, like new words and new sentences,"he explained.

For him, surprisingly he sees an analogy between Hamlet and Hellboy, as he mentioned in the same chat with CNET last year.

"He's spawned into the universe by Nazi occultists to bring about the end of the world. And he is captured by Broom, who decides to raise him. So he's an orphan who was adopted. English isn't his first language, to say the least. He's destined to bring about the apocalypse and he, in his heart, just really wants to be a good guy. He idolizes people he grew up with in comic books, like Lobster Johnson, and he wants to be like a paranormal detective.

So he's kind of a silly, sweet creature but also a demon. And he lives in a world where human beings don't accept him for who he is. So even when he winds up saving people, they still show up with pitchforks and torches to try to kill him. I think the biggest struggle for him is he's hunting down monsters, and yet he is one. So what is he doing, exactly? That's a big conflict in him.

What I think I meant by the Hamlet comment is that he's sort of a tortured guy. And he deals with it in certain ways that certainly Hamlet doesn't. He's just very witty. He's got this dry, sort of put-upon humor, but underneath all of that is this desperate conundrum of like, 'Where is this going to end? What's the end game for this?' I think that when I compared it to Hamlet, I was saying it's a mature movie with adult themes."

For director Neil Marshall, he had a very particular take on the character as he pointed out in an interview he did with EW on a podcast back in 2017:

"We've been granted permission to do it R-rated, which for me is just like taking the cuffs off. It's like, okay, so now we can just make the movie we want to make. It's not like I'm going to force it to be R-rated, but if it happens to come out that way, just because of my own sensibilities, then fine. And nobody's going to stop us. So, that's the main [difference]. And I'm sure, obviously, the success of things like *Deadpool* and *Logan* have not hurt that cause. But, also, when you go back the original material, it is kind of bloody, so I'm going to embrace that."

From the trailer released, it seems that Marshall is going for a slightly different tack than del Toro. Del Toro went for a gothic tone whereas Marshall has gone for a straighter horror feel and the R rating

"We've been granted permission to do it R-rated, which for me is just like taking the cuffs off."– Director Neil Marshall

means that it can be more bloody than its two predecessors.

Mignola informed us which of the comics it is based on when we chatted to him in January.

"More than anything it is based on *The Wild Hunt* and there are several scenes that are very close to the comics. There is also a nice bit of *Hellboy In Mexico* in there."

He also sees Harbour as a good choice for Hellboy.

"Harbour brings a very different energy to the character, He made it his own."

Lionsgate put the film back to April this year which was probably a sign that they have more confidence in it than their original release date which would have buried it in January. In terms of its box office, I think it will be a moderate hit, opening weekend and grossing around $300m overall.

It will be interesting to see if Dark Horse can resuscitate this franchise as they have plans for more adaptations on TV. With the success of *The Umbrella Academy*, Hellboy is obviously being watched very closely. Hopefully it will capture some of the spirit of the two de Toro films and Mignola's comics. We shall find out soon. *Hellboy* is out on 12 April 2019

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Summoning The Lightning

Shazam! is the latest DC Extended Universe adventure out in cinemas this April. But can DC build on the box office success of _Aquaman_ last year? JOEL MEADOWS looks at the film's development and tries to make some predictions...

Aquaman was a surprise box office hit. As of this writing it has made a staggering $1.13bn worldwide. This is the first DC film to pass the $1bn mark since *The Dark Knight Rises* back in 2012. *Shazam!* has been in production for a little while now but DC have to prove that *Aquaman* wasn't a fluke.

Shazam! is the tale of orphan Billy Batson, who finds himself with magical powers he gains from wizard Shazam! by uttering his name. Ironically, Shazam! started life as Captain Marvel, first published by Fawcett back in the 1940s. DC took over many of the Fawcett characters in the 1970s including *Captain Marvel* but Marvel Comics stopped DC from using the name Captain Marvel. So DC have been forced to call him Shazam!

"My agency sent me an appointment slip for the role of Shazam in the movie Shazam. I knew that the Rock had been cast as Black Adam, so my first reaction is, 'Why the hell are they sending me this right now?... Aren't they looking for big stars?"
Zachary Levi

The character was always seen as a bit of a Superman knockoff and DC even tried to sue Fawcett in the 1940s. But from watching the trailers, it is evident that Warner Bros. have gone for a lighter tone here than they would have done with the Man of Steel.

Director David F. Sandberg is a Swedish horror director, best known for no budget films and *Lights Out*, which was a big budget remake of his short of the same name. But James Wan, who directed *Aquaman*, was also known for making horror films too.

Its star Zachary Levi, who began his career in TV show *Chuck* but has gone on to appear in movies like *Thor: The Dark World*, *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Tangled*. Levi

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Mark Strong plays villain Sivana in Shazam!; bottom right: Billy Batson (Asher Angel) and Shazam! (Zachary Levi)

admitted in an interview that ran on Comingsoon.net this year that he was quite surprised when he got the call for Shazam!:

"My agency sent me an appointment slip for the role of Shazam in the movie Shazam. I knew that the Rock had been cast as Black Adam, so my first reaction is, 'Why the hell are they sending me this right now?…Aren't they looking for big stars or big guys?'", he revealed.

For him, it felt very similar to Marvel's *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, a film he also tested for, he told the same interview.

"It was oddly, or ironically, reminiscent of when I was camera testing for Star-Lord. I knew that Chris Pratt had also passed on that role. I wanted it so bad. There was definitely a strange thing of, 'Wow. When you are not holding on to something so tightly, if it's not something you're dying and dying for, but you can have an unbiased, somewhat clear idea of what you are trying to go after and know that you are just being you, you are bringing your essence…" Ultimately, that's what I think got me this job."

Director Sandberg just talked about making the leap from a low budget horror film like *Annabel: Creation* to a major blockbuster like *Shazam!* in a chat he just did with Comicbook.com:

"It's quite a marathon – like, it's a lot of work," the filmmaker admitted. "It's a very different way of working, just because you have to do all these pre-bits and plan everything months in advance. Then when you're shooting it, it's not always as fun as shooting a small movie, cause like you have to shoot…like today, we're shooting this little piece, and this little piece, because this piece is like a unit, this is on blue screen, this is CGI, and it's a lot of things to keep track of. So the shooting is not always fun but the result is so much more awesome than when you have these kinds of resources."

"It's quite a marathon [compared to a small budget movie]. It's a lot of work. It's a very different way of working, just because you have to do all these pre-bits and plan everything months in advance."
Director David F Sandberg

Shazam! looks like a lot of fun and I predict it won't make *Aquaman* numbers. But it will do pretty well, probably around the $850 to $900m mark. *Aquaman* showed that DC films don't always have to be dark and gritty and audiences are looking for something light these days. Also, *Avengers: Endgame* doesn't come out until the end of April so I think DC will have another hit on their hands. *Shazam!* hits cinemas this April.

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People Are Strange

JOEL MEADOWS reviews the first two episodes of *The Umbrella Academy* and *Doom Patrol*, on now on Netflix and DC Universe respectively...

The Umbrella Academy Episodes 1&2
Episode 1: Director: Peter Hoar
Episode 2: Director: Andrew Bernstein
Doom Patrol Episodes 1 & 2
Episode 1: Director: Glen Winter
Episode 2: Dermott Downs

Comic book adaptations have become such a staple of TV and film that properties you couldn't have ever imagined making the leap to the big or small screen are now being hoovered up.

The Umbrella Academy is a comic series created by former My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way and Brazilian artist Gabriel Bá, published by Dark Horse. *Doom Patrol* is a DC series that goes back to the 1960s but has been written by Gerard Way and Scottish comic legend Grant Morrison over the years. Hence the connection of sorts between the two shows.

Let's start with *The Umbrella Academy*. Colm Feore is Sir Reginald Hargreaves, a man with six adopted children, who were all born to different mothers at the same time around the globe. He has been training them to save the world but suddenly he dies and so the children are forced to make sense of a world without him. To make matters worse, one of the kids, Five (Aidan Gallagher) has disappeared. The original comic series did have spark and flair and the makers of the TV show have managed to capture some of this on the screen. *The Umbrella Academy* does look pretty lavish and it manages to capture the comic series on the screen. However some of it is a little bit flat with Ellen Page, who plays sibling Vanya, offering no sort of emotional connection at all to viewers, and Robert Sheehan as drugged-up freak Klaus coming across as annoying rather than quirky. Episode 2 is a little bit better because they have been able to dispense with the character introductions. However, it does suffer a little from having too many protagonists, which is often a problem with team shows. It is better than SyFy's *Deadly Class*, which it does share common ground with, but at the moment it is a very pretty albeit rather empty series.

Doom Patrol was introduced on TV in an episode of DC Universe's Titans show last year and is now spun off into its own series. Doom Patrol started life as a 1960s DC comic and it has been published on and off since then. Like its contemporaries the Uncanny X-Men, the Doom Patrol is a group of bizarre heroes with a professor Niles Caulder as its brilliant but tragic leader. *Doom Patrol* has a genuinely odd concept at its core. Caulder (played here by Timothy Dalton) has offered hope to Cliff Steele/ Robotman (Brendan Fraser/ Riley Shanahan), tragic former screen actress Rita Farr (April Bowlby), former pilot Larry Trainor (Matt Bomer/ Matthew Zuk) and Crazy Jane (Diane Guerrero). Alan Tudyk plays the equally strange villain Mr Nobody, taken from the Grant Morrison run. The first episode introduces us properly to each of the characters with their back story and powers, then we see how they unwittingly destroy their local Ohio town.

Doom Patrol is genuinely odd and strange and sometimes it works and sometimes it just sails off above the viewer's heads. The concepts here are intriguing and much of it feels better handled than *The Umbrella Academy* but the second episode which introduces Vic Stone/ Cyborg (Jovian Ward) takes things to an even weirder level as the team find themselves trapped inside a donkey to try and save the residents of the local town. Cyborg doesn't quite fit in with the rest of the group too. Mr Nobody does have evil plans for The Chief and The Doom Patrol but it isn't clear what they are exactly. The problem here is that the weirdness may become too odd and too grating and it may just end up losing the audience entirely. It is to DC's credit that they have launched an entire series featuring the characters but it may have worked better as a one off TV movie. Time will tell. It hasn't been picked up by a UK broadcaster yet but will probably end up on Netflix like *Titans* did.

> "Both The Umbrella Academy and Doom Patrol are worth watching but with a few reservations. We shall see if they can escape their early problems."

Both *The Umbrella Academy* and *Doom Patrol* are worth watching but with a few reservations. We shall see if both series can escape their early problems to offer something more satisfying for the viewer.

The Umbrella Academy is on Netflix worldwide while *Doom Patrol* is on DC Universe in the US

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ROY OF THE ROVERS®

Following the release late last year of the first new material in nearly two decades in the form of Tom Palmer's young adult novel Scouted and Rob Williams and Ben Willsher's graphic novel Kick-Off, Roy of the Rovers has been embraced by both older and younger readers. Now after Tom Palmer and illustrator Lisa Henke returned last month for their second novel Teamwork, Williams and Willsher are returning in March with their second outing, the ominously titled Foul Play.

"It was always the intention – and it was a tightrope to walk – that we would make this appeal to a new generation who've never heard of Roy before as well as to old fans, who'll recognise certain nods, whether they be certain characters or places," says Williams. "And it was equally important to get the spirit of this incarnation right."

Longtime Roy fans will be delighted by the appearance of Johnny 'Hard Man' Dexter and Kevin 'Mighty' Mouse, who had previously enjoyed runs in Roy of the Rovers and Tiger respectively in the 1970s and '80s. Now much older and having long since retired, the pair have been given new positions in the dugout at Melchester Rovers. "We wanted to start afresh with a brand new continuity, but we also wanted to take those beloved old characters and set them up in new positions while still retaining their essence," explains Williams. "Both Johnny Dexter and Mighty Mouse look like their old selves, and they are both ex-Melchester greats in our new stories. But their time on the pitch has passed and now they're coach and manager of the club. Newbies don't need to know anything about their pasts but if you do, it's a bit a thrill, which it was for me as I read their stories when I was a boy."

With Mighty Mouse now running the show, you have to wonder whether his former partner Hotshot Hamish can be far behind? "Without giving too much away, you may well be seeing other classic Roy characters appearing to keep rooting" boasts Williams, who has also mad some subtle changes to the other members of the Melchester Rover first team in order to make the strip more inclusive.

"We needed and wanted to make the stories relevant to the modern UK, so having a culturally diverse set of teammates was important to us," he continues. "Someone like Lofty Peak was a ginger-headed giant in the old Roy stories, but here he's a black teenager who loves basketball before Roy convinces him to give football another try."

There is also an enhanced role for Roy's sister Rocky and other female characters. "Women's football is such a big deal right now and it's getting bigger all the time," says Williams, who is also a fan of the June's FIFA Women's World Cup. "So we definitely wanted to make Rocky and Ffion Guthrie – (Rovers stalwart) Vic Guthrie's sister and Roy's 'friend' – a bigger part of the Melchester story going forward. There are definitely plans for them to have their own stories as I've actually just written a Rocky short."

With Kick-Off picking up literally the minute that Scouted leaves off, Williams and Palmer – along with Rebellion's Senior Graphic Novels editor Keith Richardson and Deputy Publishing Manager Rob Power – have ensured that the novel and the comic dovetail neatly together to tell one complete story. "We've had writers' room story conferences where Tom, Rob and Keith and I have got together to plot out the major directions of the story," says Williams. "Then it's been a case of Tom and I emailing back and forth to make sure that we compliment each other's stories, so I then drop off the tale at a certain point that he can start from, and vice versa."

After the first two installments chronicled Roy's recruitment into the Rovers ranks, the second volumes will focus on the young Race's first season as a football professional, which is far from an easy ride for either him or the beleaguered Melchester. "Rovers are struggling in Division Two when we join them, and the club has no cash so the kids have to be thrust into the first team," explains Williams. "First off, it's survival, then Roy dealing with the immediate fame of his FA Cup wonder goal, and does that go to his head? We

have an unscrupulous owner in Barry 'The Meat' Cleaver, who wants to sell the stadium, while Mouse and Johnny Dexter trying to mould a bunch of talented teenagers into a team playing a physical division against grown men. Plus Roy has to try and look after his family, as his dad is in a wheelchair, so how does he combine the two?"

Despite Melchester ultimately losing the tie against their money-bags Manchester City-style neighbours Tynecaster, we can also expect to again see their charismatic star forward, the Ronaldo-esque rival Hugo. "Roy really impressed the galactico in that game," notes Williams. "Their relationship will continue going forward, but you'll have to wait to see how, exactly."

Williams is also full of praise for artist Ben Willsher. "His work on the book has a real kinetic energy, which you really need for the match sequences," he says. "His art feels sort of manga-esque, which hopefully appeals to the young adult audience but first and foremost, his storytelling is excellent, and everything is super clear and accessible."

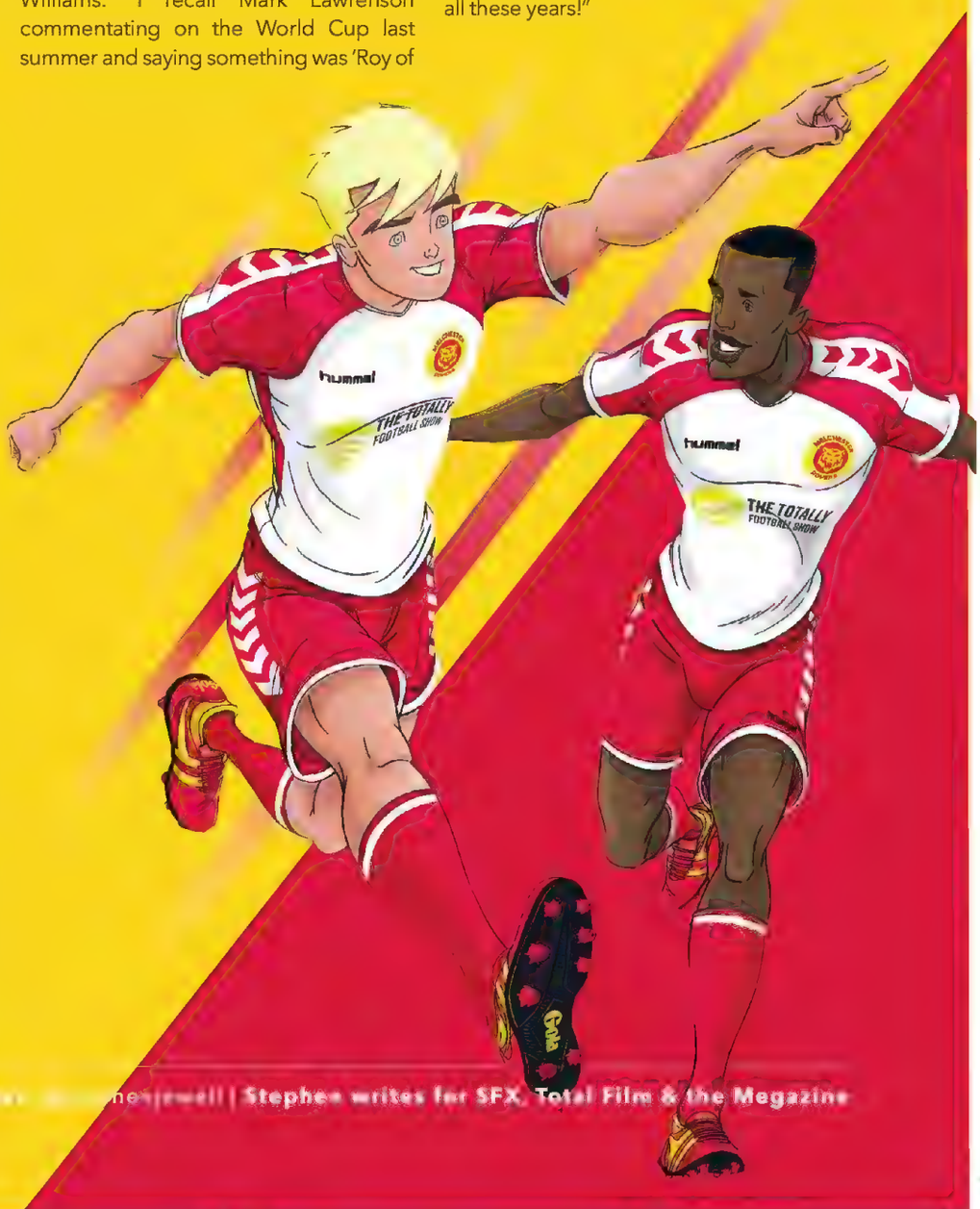
Meanwhile, with the success of the new stories, Rebellion also have plans this summer to release collections of the 1950s and '60s Roy of the Rovers stories. "We wanted to come out of the gate with something new and exciting, and to give the new stories time to stand by themselves and now that we've done that, we can look to the classic Roy of the Rovers material," says Power, who intends to tie the reprints in with this year's 65th anniversary of Roy's first appearance in Tiger in September 1954. "It's a great opportunity to celebrate the long history of comics's greatest footballer. We're really excited to get these books out there, as it'll be the first time that a lot of this material has ever been reprinted. We're also very proud of our superb reprographics team, and the work they've been doing on the Treasury list, and we can't wait for everyone to see what they're doing with Roy of the Rovers. And the two reprint books will be followed by more anniversary activity, including some huge collaborations, but you'll have to wait and see for news on that front!"

While the inaugural Billy's Boots collection delayed until 2020 after difficulties in cleaning up the old pages, you have to wonder whether the former Scorcher and Tiger favourite could also be due his own 21st Century makeover? "At the moment, we're concentrating solely on Roy," admits Power. "Launching a new children's title like this is a huge undertaking, and we don't want to lose focus on our main job here, which is to bring Roy of the Rovers back for a new generation. Having said that, Billy's Boots is easily the most talked about character after Roy, and Dan Walker even mentioned it on Football Focus recently, while discussing our FA Cup Heroes Special."

Put together in conjunction with the FA, The Roy of the Rovers FA Cup Heroes Special was published in late January to coincide with the Fifth Round of this year's cup competition. Highlighting the giant-killing exploits of lower ranked teams like Oldham Athletic and Newport County, the South Wales League Two club's manager Michael Flynn even described their win over Leicester City as 'Roy of the Rovers stuff.'

"The phrase exists even for people who may have never read the comic," says Williams. "I recall Mark Lawrenson commentating on the World Cup last summer and saying something was 'Roy of the Rovers stuff.' It's a cultural touchstone for so many people, and if you just do a Twitter search for the phrase, you'll find hundreds of references. Our job is to show a hungry audience exactly why Roy struck a chard with the nation."

"The third round was fantastic and it just goes to show how deeply embedded Roy of the Rovers is in the average football fan – or commentator or journalist's – psyche," adds Power, revealing that Rebellion have just secured another vital partnership. "It's been really important to make Roy and Melchester Rovers feel relevant to modern football fans, which is why it's been great to work with the likes of Hummel and The Totally Football Show. We're also about to bring an old Roy of the Rovers favourite back into the fold, as Gola are now Roy's official boot sponsor, and have designed a boot just for Racey, which you'll see on the cover of both Teamwork and Foul Play, and on the pitch in the graphic novels for the rest of the season. We're unbelievably chuffed to be working with Gola again after all these years!"



Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine

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Once upon a time, in the early 90s, Stuart Green had a plan, to put together a radical new football comic, something catching the spirit of the times and the spirit of the beautiful game. That comic was GLORY GLORY.

The thing is, you've probably never heard of it and you've definitely never seen it.

This is the story of the comic that should have been... featuring Stuart Green, co-editor Frank Plowright, and artists Rob Davis and Sean Longcroft.

"Basically, what I wanted was to do a comic with a level of sophistication and humour that you wouldn't find in Roy of the Rovers"

- STUART GREEN

"The idea was to take the spirit of the football fanzines of the time, the sardonic self-deprecating viewpoint about football, and make stories that were far more than simply Roy winning the FA Cup every year"

- FRANK PLOWRIGHT

They plan was to create a comic that encompassed the good and bad of the beautiful game. In the end, Glory Glory faltered, but Green, along with Rob Davis and Sean Longcroft, would take some of those ideas to appear in Roy Of The Rovers Monthly title in 1993.

Green says loved both football and football comics: "The first comics I got into were football comics, particularly Scorcher, with Nipper, Billy's Boots, the different stuff. I'd read Roy of the Rovers

GLORY GLORY

THE GREATEST FOOTBALL COMIC *YOU'VE NEVER SEEN!*

but never really got into it, he was always too clean cut. Whereas Billy's Boots was about a kid with no talent, unless he had his magic boots, so it's inspirational. Nipper was about a kid from the wrong side of the tracks, whose father was a thinly disguised alcoholic, abused his wife, that sort of thing".

Cut to the late 80s, with Green working at comics magazine Speakeasy. "I was made the editor when John Brown Publishing bought Speakeasy. John decided he wanted to invest some of the millions from Viz into his own comic line, with Dave Elliot in charge. We set up Blast! comic, but, after about four months, Dave announced that he was leaving and Kevin Eastman had given him shit tons of money to open up Tundra UK".

Now, if you don't know about the white-hot ideas factory and unbelievable money pit that was Tundra and Tundra UK, you're missing one of the most amazing tales of chaos and mismanagement in the history of comics. (For more, I'd definitely recommend a very illuminating Comics Journal interview with Kevin Eastman - www.tcj.com/the-kevin-eastman-interview-part-2).

Tundra Publishing was Kevin Eastman's thing. Obviously, the co-creator of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles had become tired of swimming, Uncle Scrooge-like, in the vast lakes of Turtles cash, and decided to set up his own comics publishing company. He, essentially, dangled a huge cheque in front of the comics industry attracting, seemingly, every comic creator with half an idea. And, not content with losing dollars hand over fist (estimates put Tundra's losses somewhere around $14 million), Eastman figured setting up Tundra UK would be a great idea.

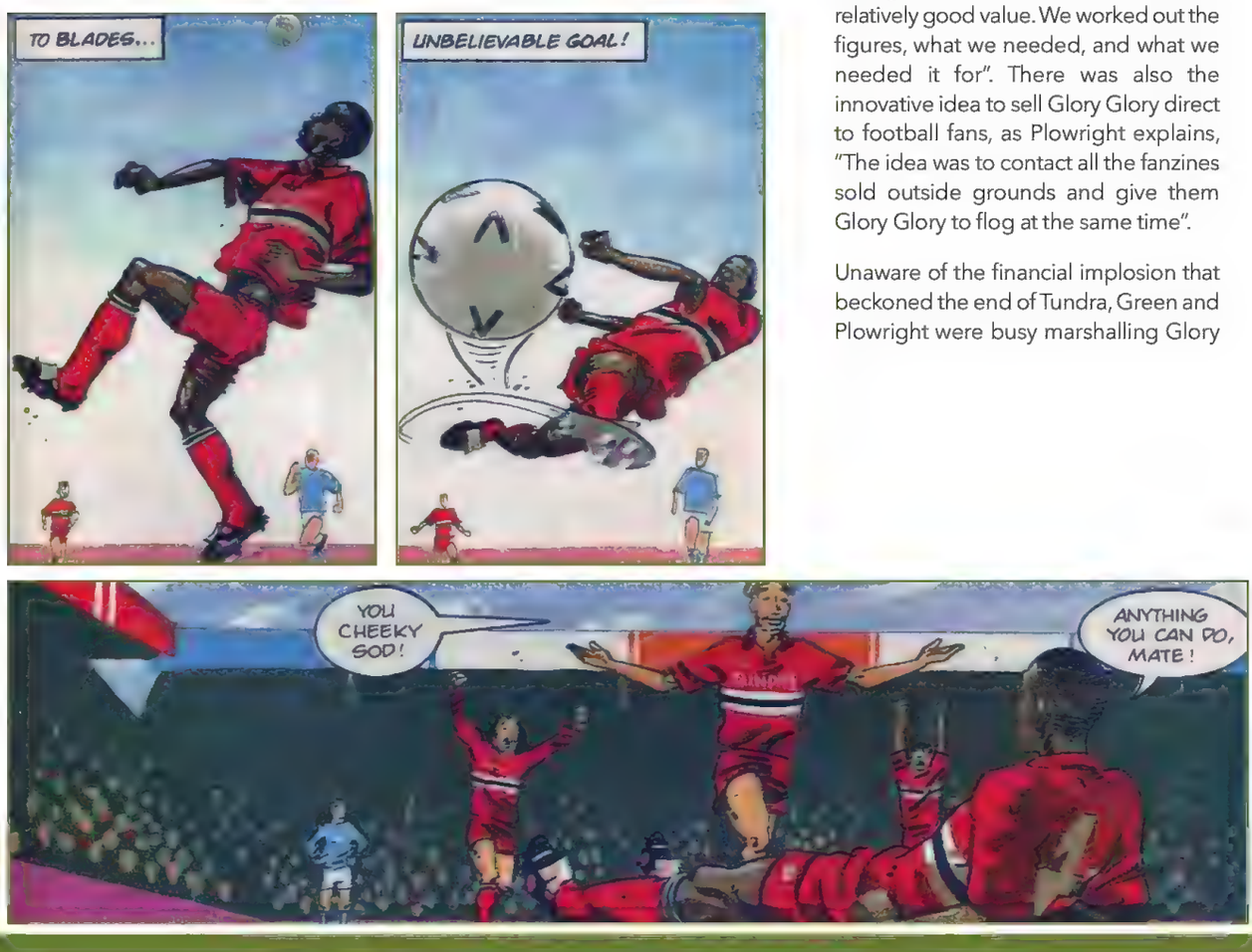
Tundra UK had a couple of years of lavish offices and PR budgets that are the stuff of legend, including hiring the Natural History Museum as a launch venue, costing £50k. That, it turns out, was Green; "Yes, it was me who put together the launch party, that was crazy!" Green also acknowledges some of the issues around Tundra UK; "The problem was that it was hugely ambitious, with Dave commissioning practically everyone he knew in comics, and he knew practically everybody!"

Tundra UK had the cash, and Green had the idea, "I remember walking down the street and it hit me like a thunderbolt - do a football comic. I sat down and wrote a 10,000 word proposal, ideas for eight or nine strips, full budget, wish list of artists and writers, the works!"

With Plowright on-board as co-editor, Green then gave the plans to Dave Elliot at Tundra UK, who loved it. "Kevin Eastman came over and Frank and I took Eastman, Elliot, and their wives, to see Chelsea versus Man Utd. Kevin totally got it and greenlit Glory Glory as a weekly football comic, with all original material". Plowright adds, "I remember this maniac, sitting behind Kevin's wife, shouting and swearing all the time, which can't have been great for her".

However, getting a brand new all-original weekly to print isn't easy and, certainly, isn't cheap, as Green points out, "The budget would have been huge, minimum £250k, before selling a single copy. Material needed stockpiling, we'd have needed to work on it for a year before launch and needed three months of issues in the bag". But, unlike a lot of Tundra UK projects, it was at least fully planned out, as Plowright explains, "The idea was to launch for the 1992 football season, August '92, so we'd be really stepping up the pace from May 92. What we were asking from Tundra for the launch was relatively good value. We worked out the figures, what we needed, and what we needed it for". There was also the innovative idea to sell Glory Glory direct to football fans, as Plowright explains, "The idea was to contact all the fanzines sold outside grounds and give them Glory Glory to flog at the same time".

Unaware of the financial implosion that beckoned the end of Tundra, Green and Plowright were busy marshalling Glory



Glory into being; "We got as far as the dummy stage", says Green, "We showed it around at comic fairs and it went down really well, with Jamie Hewlett going mental over it". Plowright, looking back at the dummy, adds, "Now, I suppose it looks a bit dated, but at the time it looked really different, really eye-catching, and that's all down to our designer, Mark Cox".

Looking through the dummy issue, you can see the great depth of material, starting with the main strip, Ironbridge, by Green, Si Spencer, and Rob Davis. "Stuart took a lot of the things he was going to do with Ironbridge to ROTR", says Plowright, "It was his version of how Roy should be done".

Plowright, with artist Caspar Williams, provided These Blokes, a view from the stands that Plowright says, "Came from the moaning old gits I used to stand behind on the terraces all those years", and then there was Tales From The Dugout, which Plowright describes as "Our Future Shock thing, for want of a better term. Like a few things, it ended up in Roy of the Rovers". Gary & Warren Pleece had Len Shacklewick, football pundit, there was David Leach's super-silly Bobby Stone, Football's Man Of Rock, about a footballer's misadventures after an accident left him encased in lava. Libero & The Hammer was the tale of two very different Brit footballers in Italy, written by Mike Gibas, with art by Nabiel Kanan, fresh from his incredible breakthrough comic, Exit. And work was lined up from Gordon Rennie, The Pleece Brothers, Philip Bond, and many more. However, there was one artist they wanted who didn't get involved, "The only person we couldn't persuade was Mike McMahon", says Plowright, "It was a big shame, because he's a big football fan. But, his view on it was that if he tried to draw any football strip it would drain the love of the game for him".

I PAID GOOD MONEY TO WATCH THIS RUBBISH. IN THE AIR TO ONE END, UP BACK TO T'OTHER.
GET MONEY
IT'S LIKE WATCHING A KID'S BALLOON. THERE'S NO SKILL LEFT ANYMORE.

When Green, Plowright, Davis and Longcroft talk about Glory Glory, you really get a sense of how damn great it could have been. "The aim of Glory Glory was to be a modern football comic", says Green, "The main strip, Ironbridge, by Rob Davis, was set in a city like Manchester, with two huge, rival clubs, their rivalry feeding into the strip. On the flip side, there was a strip about a crap Sunday league football team called The Bumblers, full of players desperate to get off at half-time for a fag".

Sean Longcroft, artist on The Bumblers, takes up the tale, "The Bumblers was scripted by Gary Pleece. This was the story of the 'Hampton Metaphysicals'- apparently the name of an actual Brighton Sunday league pub team Gary had played for. Gary's descriptions inspired me to produce a team of characters I ended up genuinely loving, a 'baggy' stoner, a laddish Club 18-30 bellend, a home improvement enthusiast, all shell suit and mullet, an ageing acid casualty, an existentialist goalie, and this overweight 'everyman'-type captain, whose beer gut and 'tash were the instant emblem of the strip".

Another Glory Glory strip, Stopper & Shoot, came from Gordon Rennie, again with Longcroft on art. Green describes Stopper as "a modern version of Hot-Shot Hamish, your Vinnie Jones type violent thug, with loads of comic elements". Longcroft adds, "The idea was to emulate those eternal battles between Wile E Coyote and Road Runner. This particular war without end was between a brutal agricultural centre-half and a flashy ultra-skilful star striker, presumably with some spectacular graphic violence".

But, inevitably, things started to go wrong, "We were told we'd have to go fortnightly, then monthly, and then it was 'we can't afford it'", says Green, "I was quite angry at the time about it and, probably, said some things I regret". Plowright continues, "I think Tundra just had too many people not knowing what they were doing and they should have tied things down a bit more. But, most of the stuff that did come out was quality. I suppose it depends on who you talk to but I'd guess a lot of people would have see Stuart and I as the ones with the vanity project, draining all the money, with nothing coming of it, but I think that's to do with differing ideas of the cost of the national launch would have been".

With Tundra UK gone, Green took Glory Glory around publishers, looking for a deal, "I spent about six months trying to find a publisher, but everybody wanted it to be a footballing Viz, which wasn't what it was, at all". However, a meeting at Fleetway did end

up with Green taking the job of producing the new ROTR Monthly, bringing along Davis, Longcroft, and some of the ideas from Glory Glory. "I had no other offers and I was skint so... you know?", Green days, "But, I was pretty flattered to be asked to write Roy".

Longcroft remembers Glory Glory, and the subsequent ROTR Monthly, as a huge step up for both his and Davis' art, "Being required to work in colour forced us to develop. Rob's new work was a revelation, he found a direct route to the aesthetic beauty of football". Green, as well, is still amazed at Davis' work, "It was a fantastic collaboration, Rob would take my script and turn it into something magical".

As for Davis, he remembers Glory Glory as something that was, "As much about working class culture around football as it was about the heroics of the football star player. We [Davis & Longcroft] both found our niche within the comic. For my part it was my figure drawing and ability to convey the way people move that landed me the job on the lead strip. It was work on this with Stuart that led to him pitching us as a team to reinvent ROTR after Glory Glory collapsed".

In the end, Glory Glory simply wasn't to be. We can see a little of what might have been with the 19 issues of ROTR Monthly. And, thanks to Green, Plowright, Davis, and Longcroft, we do get to see some of what was proposed, as they've generously provided previously unseen artwork from that dummy first issue and more. Having seen it, having talked to those involved, I think Glory Glory could have been THE best football comic we'd have ever seen, a perfect comic for the times.

THE NEW BOY WAS IN THERE QUICK, STUART.
"OOOOH! THAT WAS CLOSE! KEEP 'EM COMING, HAMMER! YOU WERE SAYING, MR CHAIRMAN?"
"I WAS JUST... ER... REMARKING UPON YOUNG HAMMERSMITH. HE'S AT HIS PEAK WOULDN'T YOU SAY? OUR BIGGEST ASSET?"
EPISODE ONE: NESSUN DORMA (NONE SHALL SLEEP)
Libero & the HAMMER
BY MIKE GIBAS

"...a modern version of ***Hot-Shot Hamish***, your Vinnie Jones type violent thug"

Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:** @richardbruton

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Richard Piers Rayner

Best known for teaming up with Jamie Delano on Hellblazer in the late '80s and illustrating John Wagner's graphic novel Road to Perdition – which was subsequently made into a movie by Sam Mendes – Richard Pier Rayner is also a dedicated football fan. Having spent sixteen years as artist-in-residence at his beloved Middlesbrough FC, he also wrote and drew Middlesbrough FC - The Unseen History, an account of some of Boro's more memorable moments from throughout its 143-year-old history.

"I was pretty much born with both close to my heart," he says of his lifelong love of both football and comics. "As a youngster, I was allowed a Saturday trip to the local newsagents to spend my pocket money on a favourite comic. Initially, this would have been one of the English weeklies and I had brief devotions to Valiant, Tiger, Lion, Hotspur and even Look and Learn when it absorbed the comic section of Ranger."

But it wasn't long until the young Rayner discovered the holy grail of American comics, first picking up a copy of Dell Comics's Lone Ranger. "From there, I discovered Gold Key, DC and finally Marvel Comics, and they were all irregularly available at the little newspaper shop on the corner of Tavistock Street in Middlesbrough where my grandparents lived," he recalls. "They'd bought the house because of its proximity to the football ground and there at the far end of the narrow cobbled street loomed (Middlesbrough's former home) Ayresome Park itself. So on a Saturday winter's afternoon, I'd be scoffing down my beans on toast before settling in front of the fire to get absorbed in the latest adventures of Tarzan, Turok, Son of Stone, Green Lantern or Justice

Rayner applied to become Middlesbrough's Artist in Residence in early 2000

League of America, which were all among my earliest favourites At the same time, I was becoming more and more intrigued by the sound of footsteps echoing from the street outside and the music from the marching band that in those days formed the pre-match entertainment at the football ground. Then there'd be the glare from the floodlights, the cheering and the jeering, the excited stamping of feet on the wooden boards of the grandstand and Granddad coming home at five o'clock wreathed in winter chill and tobacco smoke, telling us what a load of rubbish it was and how he was never going again – until next time!"

Apart from the more fantastical US superheroes, Rayner also enjoyed Roy Race's early appearances in Tiger. "His was one of the first annuals I'd look for on Christmas morning," he admits. "And I've also got fond memories of Billy's Boots, which was about a boy who'd inherited a pair of antique football boots that magically endowed whoever put them on with the sporting prowess of the long-departed hero who once wore them."

'Tiny' Tim Williamson was Boro goalkeeper from 1902 to 1923. He played over 600 games with 130(!) consecutive appearances to his name. If he wasn't too busy at his own end of the pitch, he also took on penalty taking duties in 1910, scoring against Liverpool in a 2-2 draw on April 23 and against Bristol City in a 3-0 victory on September 17. He gave up that job after missing one in an FA Cup defeat to non-league West Ham United in February, 1912 in a game Boro lost by a single goal. Perhaps it wasn't such a good idea after all...

After seeing the vacancy advertised in a match-day programme, Rayner applied to become Middlesbrough's Artist in Residence in early 2000. Established partly as a National Year of the Artist event that was aimed at placing artists in unusual situations, the position was only meant to run for twelve months. However, Rayner ended up staying until 2016, albeit with a slightly different remit. "Initially, I'd just produce an illustration based on a recent game or some behind the scene observations," explains Rayner, who was then asked to concentrate on the club's illustrious but sometimes neglected past.

"I wrote and drew Middlesbrough FC: The Unseen History, which included some comic style pages, which then developed into my producing a comic book style page for each home game's programme," he continues. "It became a sequential club history from the 1800s, through the two World Wars to the present, illustrating the exploits of forgotten heroes who if we had any pictures of them at all, it would just be a blurry portrait. But I could bring them back to life, illustrate them in action and bring forgotten heroes – and villains – back into the spotlight."

Along with Road to Perdition, club officials had seen Rayner's work on Doctor Who Monthly story Evening's Empire, which saw Sylvester McCoy's Seventh Doctor had traveling to his hometown. Written by former Doctor Who script editor, the setting was changed from Portsmouth to Middlesbrough at Rayner's behest. "In order to make the mundane world as realistic as possible in contrast to the exotic alien environment the story would take us to, I wanted to make it as realistic as possible so setting it somewhere I knew well made sense," reasons Rayner. "I based the villain's earthly location on my grandparent's house, so Ayresome Park could be seen in the background, and there was also some Boro football programmes scattered among the debris in his lair. And I'm not sure if we knew it at the time and I'm certain Andrew at least didn't but during World War Two, a German plane had actually crashed in the river Tees almost exactly where we featured the same event in the story, which might actually be a bit spooky."

With Rayner not exactly renowned for his fast work rate, Evening's Empire was plagued by scheduling problems, and artwork being lost and mangled in the post. After the first episode was published in Doctor Who Monthly #180 in October 1991, no further installments appeared until the whole story was eventually showcased in the Doctor Who Comic Classics Autumn Special in September 1993. Eventually reprinted by current Doctor Who Monthly publishers Panini in their fourth volume of Seventh Doctor adventures, Rayner was unable to lay his hands on all of the original artwork, and so he subsequently opted to recreate seven whole pages from scratch.

"Without them, the book couldn't have gone ahead, so I offered to redraw them and Panini were kind enough to let me do so," he says. "There are inevitable stylistic changes between the old work and the new but I hope that it's not too much of a clash. It was a pleasure to revisit a piece that I had fond memories of, and I remain proud of it."

Author: Stephen Jewell | **Twitter:** @stephenjewell | **Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine**

UGHH! THIS COMIC IS BORING! SO CLICHÉ
LOL
A LOT
DAILY COMIC!
FRIENDS, WHO'D HAVE 'EM, EH?
GASP! DID SOMEONE SAY BORING??
WHAT THE?!!
THERE'S NO PROBLEM STATING THE OBVIOUS, CHAP!
"PUFF"
"PUFF"
CALL A SPADE A SPADE, EH?
YOU KNOW WHAT? BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SUCH A CHAMPION FACE, I'LL LET YOU IN ON A LITTLE SECRET...
OH BOY!!
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"CLICK"
YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP FOR ALL THINGS INDIE AND SMALL PRESS. NEWS, REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS AND MORE!
THANKS FOR THE TIP YOU WONDERFUL, CREEPY LITTLE MAN!
NOT AT ALL, MY BOY!
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THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

"A perfect comics focused day out"

Alex Thomas braves the snow and heads to True Believers 2019

With much of the country covered in snow and ice, like something out of Game Of Thrones, it was time for the UK comic convention scene to make it's debut with True Believers Comic Festival 2019.

Having moved from the Cheltenham Race Course, into the more easily accessible Jury's Inn, True Believers may have lost the scale of it's large and impressive venue. But it has gained an easy to find alternative, with a very old school comic con atmosphere.

Upon arriving, we were met with the familiar site of cosplayers and comic fans queuing to get in – along with one or two baffled guests trying to check in alongside Kylo Ren and Spider-man. The venue was split into two sites, the main comics area was in the conference area just next to the entrance. While the cosplay area was in a sunny and light atrium with meeting rooms off to the side. This allowed the 'church and state' of comic cons to not over lap too much, but without making either group feel stuck out on a limb.

The comics area was packed with loads of old friends like Gateway City's Russell Olson, Slang Pictorial's Nick Prolix, NPC Tea's Sarah Milman, TimeBomb Comics' Steve Tanner, Gav and Emily Mitchell, Horde Comics, the Awesome comics team, Galaxafreak Andy Pawley and the irrepressible Robin Etherington. And many new ones too, such Nick Bryan, Gustavo Vargas, Sam London, Sam Roads, Nic Ho Chee and Comichaus supremo Pete Genepool who we met for the first time. Taking a loop around the two conference rooms to catch up with everyone was an epic task – but we were up for the challenge. With the tables more closely packed in, it gave the whole day a much busier and more bustling feel as you had to push past people or squeeze through gaps in order to get round, and this was a great change from the often gaping aisles at the racecourse.

As we made our way home, we reflected on one of the best comic conventions we have been to and a perfect example of what a fantastic comics focused event is all about. Not even the cold weather and a new venue could stop Troobs from giving it's fans the warmest welcome.

"The True Believers brand is becoming one of the most enjoyable and most reliable banners on the UK con circuit."
- Pipedream Comics
TRUE BELIEVERS COMIC FESTIVAL 2019
JURYS INN
CHELTENHAM
SATURDAY
2nd FEBRUARY 2019
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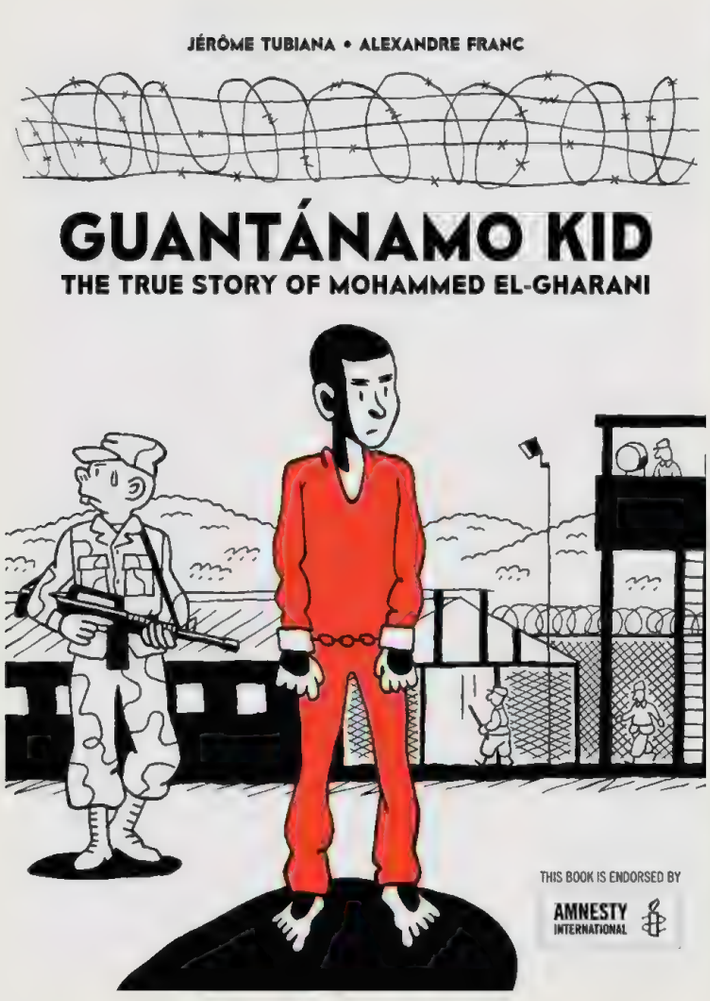
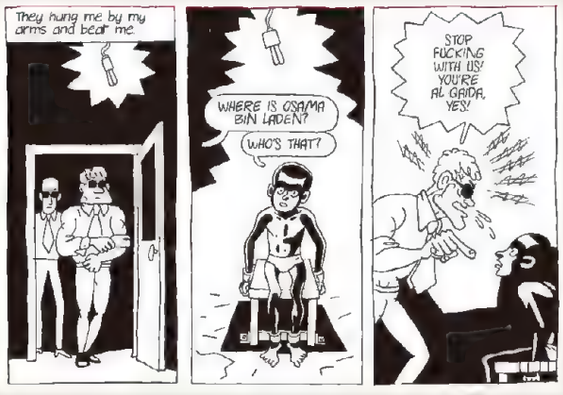
www.oktruebelievers.com


JÉRÔME TUBIANA • ALEXANDRE FRANC
GUANTÁNAMO KID
THE TRUE STORY OF MOHAMMED EL-GHARANI
THIS BOOK IS ENDORSED BY
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

They took me to a prison where they started questioning me.
LISTEN, AMERICANS ARE GOING TO INTERROGATE YOU. JUST SAY YOU'RE FROM AL-QAIDA, AND THEY'LL SEND YOU HOME WITH SOME MONEY.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
TELL THE AMERICANS YOU WENT WITH AL-QAIDA TO AFGHANISTAN, O.K.?.
WHY WOULD I LIE?
Al-Qaida: I had never heard that word before.

"An extraordinary story about an extraordinary man, which still has relevancy today"



Guantanamo Kid

Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Writer: Jérome Tubiana
Artist: Alexandre Franc
Price: £14.99 from SelfMadeHero.com

This new book from SelfMadeHero is a fantastic example of how the comics medium can be used to chronicle extraordinary lives like no other.

Journalist Jerome Tubiana complies this first hand account of the wrongful imprisonment and torture of one of the prison camp's youngest residents. He documents the abuses El Gharani suffered in painstaking detail with the meticulousness of a diary as we follow him from his early days in Saudi Arabia, through his capture by the Pakistani army, and then his time in Guantanamo.

The abuses he suffers range from interrogation, physical torture and unprovoked beatings, through to mental torture and beyond. While this degree of detail means it is not always an easy read, it helps to emphasise the amount of time El Gharani was held, as well as the sheer range of punishments he endured. This in turn showcases how he copes with these abuses, from making friends with other inmates, to challenging and antagonising the guards, to ultimately meeting a lawyer and contacting the media to tell his story and get released.

The book is packed with powerful and poignant art from Alexandre Franc and is filled with very careful and considered imagery on every page. For such a hard-hitting subject Franc has a very light, cartoonish approach, yet the subjects he covers are anything but. While this may seem like it lacks an obvious visual edge, it need the lightness to the artwork to make the book more than a list of travesties. Instead it's more akin to something like Maus which uses cartoons to reveal the humanity of it's lead, and with it the way that his humanity is torn away.

Guntanamo Kid is a powerful and challenging read, that showcases the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity as well as the inhumanity to which some will go in order to pursue their agenda. An extraordinary story about an extraordinary man, and one which has relevancy and impact today.

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Zero Jumper

Publisher: Markosia Comics
Writer/Artist: Patrick Mulholland
Price: £12.99 from Amazon

Zero Jumper tells the story of Juno, last survivor of the human race who, with the help of her trusty robot sidekick IO, is 'jumping' through time and space to seek out crystals containing zero point energy in order to change the past.

On a trip to locate one of these elusive crystals, Juno is discovered by the being responsible for humanity's extinction, which results in a race against time for Juno and her allies to defeat their enemy and undo the damage he had wrought.

Writer/artist Patrick Mulholland has created an incredibly action-packed and epic story. It's one which admittedly struggles in it's beginning with the pacing, and feels somewhat rushed and lacking exposition about what has happened or is happening. (especially in relation to the science of Juno's jumping). However, while the flaws seem more apparent to begin with, they soon give way to a really well written and nicely crafted series.

The handful of lead characters who appear have a great deal of depth and personality, especially IO who is reminiscent of DC's Skeets. While other characters have this air of mystery surrounding them, which works nicely with the overall narrative.

Mulholland's art is glorious and makes all the sci-fi, space heavy pages look every bit the epic it reads like. The inks and the colours in Zero Jumper help to really seal the deal on this series as the former look so smooth and help the work pop, while the latter gives every panel this immensely vibrant run. These visuals are at their best during the finale as the tension and action ramp up and the pace quickens.

While it may have leapt out of the gate with a stumble, Zero Jumper has turned out to be a visually stunning, compellingly emotional story about love, friendship and sacrifice which nestles nicely behind a high-octane adventure story.

The Second Coming of Krent Able

Publisher: Knockabout Comics
Writer/Artist: Krent Able
Price: £14.99 from Amazon

From the opening strip, which sees a creepy doctor based on Nick Cave tease a sleeping bird while his patient attempts to talk to him about his 'all body cancer', then you know you are in for something uniquely strange with this book.

It's a title which pushes things beyond all boundaries of good taste to create something devilishly wicked and darkly hilarious. Able's artwork has that crazed and sexual sensibility of Robert Crumb mixed in with the pop art anarchy of Shaky Kane and the dark humour of Chris Morris. But all dialled up to 11.

If this is your first time exploring the work of Able then be warned. If you are in anyway offended by anything dark, strange or unsettling (or to do with the monarchy!) then give this a very wide berth. However if you are in the mood for something delightfully dark and packed full of malevolent mischief from one of UK comics most unique and twisted voices, then this is definitely worth a read. (Although perhaps not in public!)

Produced in association with Pipedream Comics
For more great indie comics coverage visit www.pipedreamcomics.co.uk

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Revenant Part One

Publisher: Horde Comics
Writer: Dave Killian & Andy Conduit-Turner
Artist: Beth Varni
Price: £3 from hordecomics.com

The new book from the Horde Comics team sees us step back in time to Victorian London and the streets of Whitechapel during the time of Jack the Ripper.

There is another killer on the loose and he is racking up as high a body count as the Ripper – except his murders also seem to have a supernatural element to them. The idea of adding a spooky element to such a well known genre as 'Victorian Murders', but also having a killer running parallel to Jack the Ripper, makes for a really interesting read. It inevitably gets comparisons to books like From Hell, or more recently These Savage Shores, but is in a very different genre to those and so direct comparisons are unfair.

Killian and Conduit-Turner's story is built on the bones of a really strong central concept. Although this first issue spends a bit too much time with the enigmatic Lord Carstairs for our liking, and lacks a bit of action, it sets the scene well.

The artwork from Beth Varni is also strong, and thanks to a slightly anime angularity to the people makes it feel very different to others in the genre. With a strong intro and intriguing final scenes there are enough questions posed in Revenant to bring us back for another stab in the alleyway, and this is definitely one of those books which is going to be more rewarding once all the pieces are in play.

Blinker

Publisher: Madius Comics
Writer/Artist: Rosie Packwood
Price: TBC from www.madiuscomics.co.uk

After the fantastic success of The Incredible Bun, Rosie Packwood has been recruited as a fully fledged member of the Madius Comics crew. And with that comes her full debut book Blinker.

Set in a space station somewhere in space, Merrik is a young man on the run from some mysterious overlords. He is helped by the voice of a mysterious benefactor, who we later learn is a ship's AI called Vitatrix and Merrik is on the run because he has special transportation powers when he blinks. Which he inevitably does.

Blinker is a really solid debut which starts off with a lot of action and keeps up a strong pace from the start. The concept is interesting, although the idea of a super human escaping from a sinister corporation feels a bit too Firefly-like, to be truly unique. We could really have done with a bit more depth of character and explanation of the world in which our story is taking place to help it stand out.

The artwork is solid, and the world stylish and slick, but it could have done with a bit of colour to really liven things up – instead it feels more like an entry from Madius' anthology Papercuts and Inkstains than it's own series.

We hope that this is just a bit of first issue teething problems and that subsequent issues can flesh out and put meat on the bones of this blink and you'll miss it, action packed first issue.

Waking Life

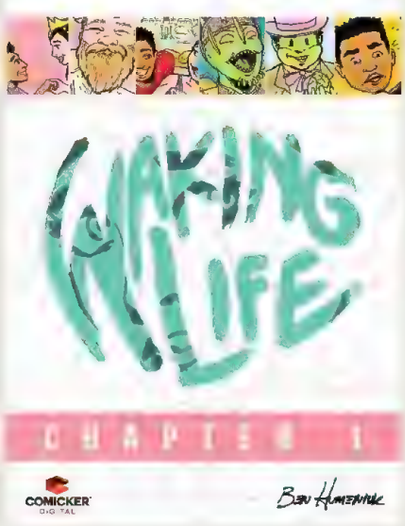
Publisher: Comicker Digital
Writer/Artist: Ben Humeniuk
Price: £0.69 from ComiXology

Robbie is a teenager struggling with family, high school and homework. But in his dreams he is the all action sidekick to the princess of the dream world. As he gets older their friendship starts to drift until an invasion of nightmares makes the princess come to Robbie's world and join her best friend in high school.

Waking Life has that classic streak of YA fantasy fiction to it. While writer Ben cites Degrassi Junor High and Windsor McKay's Nemo in Slumberland as influences, for us it had elements of Neil Gaiman Sandman with a bit of the Never-ending Story and CS Lewis' Narnia books thrown in for good measure.

Humeniuk pulls double duty, providing story and art. The visuals are relatively simplistic and unfaddy, but it suits the tone of the story. It has quite an old fashioned feel to it, feeling a bit Bronze Age rather than anything too much further back.

This a very solid first volume, with enough accessibility for younger readers, but without dumbing down too far for older readers. With the emphasis shifting to the high school in later chapters, it is one with plenty of potential to keep you awake.



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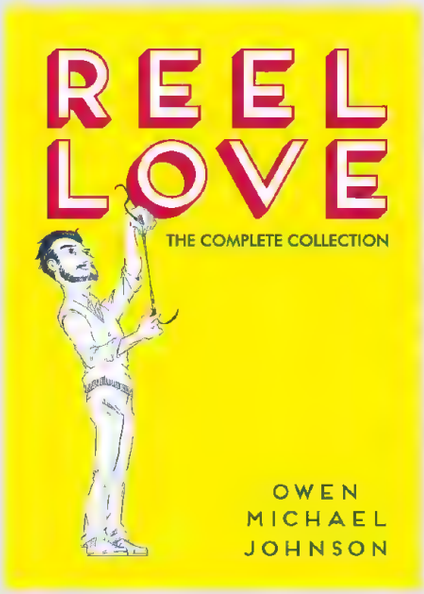
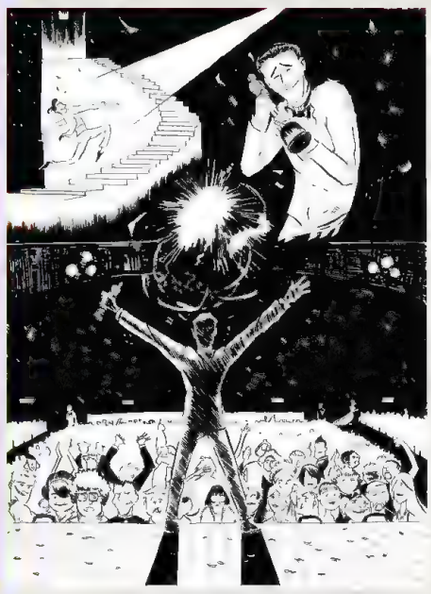
"It's inspired by my experiences as a film-fan and the cumulative effect of years of watching them"

Owen Michael Johnson talks Reel Love: The Collected Edition

One of the many new indie comics being released via the Unbound crowd-funding platform, Owen Michael Johnson's Reel Love: The Complete Collection is an emotionally truthful story about growing up in love with cinema. We caught up with him to find out more.





Reel Love was funded via Unbound but it took Owen over a year to raise what he needed

Tell us a bit about the background for Reel Love. It feels very personal, is it based on your own experiences?
Owen Michael Johnson: I've grown accustomed to calling it a semi-autobiographical comic because, while it's characters are based on my own life and relationship experiences, many of the specific scenarios and events have received everything from minor alterations to wholesale invention, depending on my needs to make it a universal (and more importantly satisfying) story.

When were the original chapters released? Was there quite a big gap between each volume
OMJ: The first chapter was released in 2014, with the second chapter published by my own comics label a year later in 2015. Before completing it, I seemed to get side-tracked writing Beast Wagon, a 6 issue horror mini-series about revolutionary zoo animals along with artist John Pearson. Unbound approached me in 2017 about completing Reel Love (always conceived as three acts) and releasing it as a hardcover. Unbound are the world's first crowdfunding publisher, and together we worked for funding for a year and I completed the final chapter between January and May 2018.

You can see how your work improves were you ever tempted to revisit it?.
OMJ: You're quite right to note that the artwork improves and develops with each chapter. The desire to 'George Lucas' the early chapters was strong, and I did in fact re-draw four pages of chapter two while creating the final act. But in the end I decided that way lay madness. It was a book I very much came into myself making, and stands as a testament to that growth. It would be dishonest to the person who I was at the time to edit and generally mess with. I was very lucky (or perhaps it was always meant to be that way) that the 'scrappy to less scrappy' art mirrors the age and growth of the character over the course of the story. At least – that's what I tell myself!

What movies have most inspired you for Reel Love?
OMJ: The creation of Reel Love is inspired – in part – by my experiences as a film-fan and the cumulative effect of years of watching them, rather than individual films, although of course there are touch-stones. Cinema Paradiso is a big one and the British film Son of Rambow particularly.

Purchase Reel Love: The Collected Edition from Amazon for £14.99

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AND THE TRIBES OF HEOROT KNEW MANY TIMES OF BETRAYAL.
BUT WHILST THE KEEPERS DO KEEP THE NINETY EIGHT RITES OF ELFHILDA NO HARM WILL COME TO THOSE OF THE FAITHFUL.
AND EORTHA THE GREAT SLEEPS WITH HER THANES UNDER HEOROT STATION

Cryowulf #1 & #2

Publisher: Sam Roads Comics
Writer: Sam Roads
Artist: Ben Matsuya
Price: TBC

Cryowulf mixes olde English myth and legend with far future science fiction to create a truly breath taking and mind blowing read.

The opening pages read like an Olde English poem, and give a hint of the back story of the world in which we live. But these words are juxtaposed with shots of galaxies and spaceships, summing up the dual nature of this world we are about to enter.

Cryowulf is a densely crafted story in a complex and involved world, which at times may be off-putting to some. The language of the story is complex in places (with it's mix of Scandi style myths and cults) and completely incomprehensible in others (but that is because they switch to Gaelic for a couple of pages!) and makes reading Cryowulf a challenge at times. Roads has clearly mapped out his world in intricate detail (from the religions, to the back story to language) and the way the characters discuss it, you don't always get a handle on exactly what is going on. However, this is one of the books where the quality of what you see on the page urges you onwards.

A large reason to continue is the absolutely jaw dropping artwork from newcomer Ben Matsuya. The line work has an expressive quality to it, which means every character is beautifully realised and packed full of life and energy. It reminded us of Eric Zawadzki's work on Eternal, but with the depth and range of Chris Wildgoose in Porcelain (And some of the most sumptuous colours around).

While the concept of the story hangs on the idea of it being a gender-flipped version of Beowulf, as a casual reader you don't really find yourself worrying about this too much. Instead it's a story with a strong female cast, believable and emotionally engaging characters and some of the best artwork we've seen on the indie scene in ages.

Freedom Bound

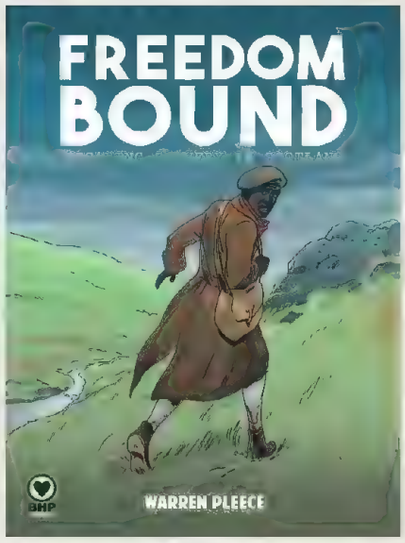
Publisher: BHP Comics
Writer/Artist: Warren Pleece
Price: £19.99 from BHP Comics Store

Slavery and Scotland is not a topic and location you would instantly put together, so Freedom Bound makes for a really thought-provoking read.

Writer/artist Warren Pleece mixes fact and fiction, extrapolating true events into much longer stories. They range from: a young woman who comes over to live in Scotland from America with her master and goes on the run; a young man who comes to Scotland for work but is embraced as part of the community; and a young slave who take his master to court in order to secure his freedom.

The stories are told slowly and very deliberately, mixing fact and fiction to create a really absorbing tale. While it may lack sensational moments and can feel a bit dry at times, it is very smartly crafted to create a book that is designed to educate and prompt thought as much as it is to entertain.

With notse in the back giving a context to each story it is a really different look at slavery – especially compared to the Deep South cotton fields which we are used to from these kind of books.



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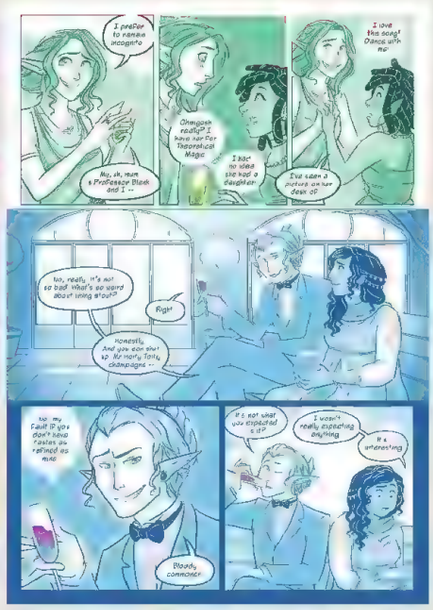
"I wanted to write about a person who was a destructive force, but is now trying to live a normal life"

Sarah Milman talks Welsh deities and teashops in **NPC Tea**

Sarah Millman burst on to the UK small press scene with her pug based adventure Heart Of Time. However with NPC-Tea (the tale of an ancient deity working in a Cardiff tea shop) and some of the most unique artwork around, it has become her new signature title. We caught up with Sarah to find out about orcs and goblins in the real world and just what is her favourite tea?



NPC Tea has a signature colour scheme which started as a short cut to help save time.

NPC Tea is set in a mixture of real and magical worlds, where did the idea for mixing them up come from?

Sarah Millman: There are so many epic fantasy stories and games that are straight-faced and medieval, and the idea of doing something modern and light with traditionally heavy fantasy elements appealed to me a lot. I often start with characters too, and this time it was Bryn. I wanted to write something about a person who was previously a destructive force, who is now trying desperately to live a normal life. A fantasy/modern setting seemed perfect for that.

It's based in a tea shop in Cardiff, how important was it for you to give the place a familiar location?

SM: Cardiff is such a brilliant place to live, and I wanted the comic to be set somewhere familiar to make the contrast between the magical elements and the real world more stark. What's lovely about Cardiff is that it's a city, but has all the idiosyncrasies of a small town – if there were orcs out and about in the real world, there would probably be a good deal of them in Cardiff.

I've based it on my favourite tea shops, but there's actually an empty car park on the street where it's set. Womanby Street is a bit of an inside joke for Cardiffians: it's a street filled with nightclubs and bars, and would be a terrible place for a tea shop.

Do you ever wonder what's hiding in your local cafe?

SM: Let's be fair, it's Wales – nothing would surprise me! Though I hope for a good brew and some lovely cake, and that they're not hidden too well…

Did you have to do lots of teashop research? What's your brew of choice?

SM: Cardiff has some lovely cafés and teashops (Barker is my favourite) which I do a lot of writing in anyway, so spending more time relaxing in them and drinking tea for "research" was definitely no hardship. I focused on shops that were less traditional and more… well, hipster, and tried to make Y Ddraig a scruffier version of that. Not quite cool enough to be popular, not traditional enough to attract purists.

I'm a tea nerd so I enjoy trying new brews but always fall back on Earl Grey, with milk and one sugar. And from a tea bag rather than loose leaf which is a crime in itself…

You can purchase NPC Tea from etsy.com/UK/shop/MilmoComics

High Priestess

Publisher: Damn Dirty Comics
Writer/Artist: Rees Finlay
Price: Free via the Comichaus App

Rees Finlay's The High Priestess is a reboot of his 2015 self published series that will see the 'heart-breaking story finally resolved'.

Holly Peters is the titular High Priestess, an unwitting soldier in the middle of a war between the forces of Heaven and those of Hell. After halting a bank robbery, Holly is tasked with tracking down a drug dealer in league with the forces of evil.

It's a dark and gritty story with a protagonist who feels a cross between Jessica Jones and John Constantine. Although the story struggles a bit at first, Finlay soon adds pace and intrigue, along with nuggets of backstory to help turn this into an intriguing read with plenty of unanswered questions.

Finlay's artwork complements his story with an equally dark and rough style which reminded us of fellow small press street hero book Brethren Born or, more generally artist Jon Scrivens' horror work.

With a bundle of questions which need answering by the end, Finlay has crafted a story which, at the very least, needs a second issue to answer those questions and, if it can build on its momentum, ask more beyond.

A New Jerusalem

Publisher: Myriad Editions
Writer: Benjamin Dickson
Price: £12.99 from Amazon

Set in the immediate aftermath of V.E. day, A New Jerusalem sees 11 year old Ralph's father return from the frontline early. Edward is suffering from 'shell-shock' or what we now know as PTSD, and is struggling to acclimatise to life on civvy street. While Ralph is coming to terms with having a father in his life for the first time, as well as reconciling that with the fact his father is not the comic book hero he was expecting.

Dickson handles the whole story in a very sympathetic and engaging way, but without ever sugar coating the events that happen. Edward is withdrawn and struggling to cope with life outside the army and the changes that have happened in the world since he has been away. He becomes violent to his family and those around him, yet rather than be vilified for his actions is protected by both his wife and also the local vicar (an ex-soldier, who is the only one Edward is able to open up to). It does a potent job of reminding us how institutionalised the military can make someone, and how difficult adjusting to life in the real world can be. But also how much attitudes about post-traumatic stress and mental health have changed in the past 70 years.

Although the subject matter may sound hard going, and there are moments which are very emotionally raw, Dickson also has a lightness of touch to parts of the story which makes it very readable and even quite enjoyable, mainly featuring Ralph.

Visually the book looks fantastic, with Dickson using a pencil sketch style similar to Rachael Ball's Wolf, but with a more serious tone that is akin to Raymond Briggs. He mixes incredibly detailed and realistic landscapes (such as the bombed out buildings the boys play in), with a quite simplified style for the people - using only a simple dot for the eyes. This means that some of the talking heads scenes can feel a bit basic, but in actuality helps relay the importance of the story by creating a very unfussy and uncluttered page.

A New Jerusalem is one of those books which you find yourself thinking about, long after you have turned the final page. Thought provoking, powerful, insightful and compelling.

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SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

The best new small press titles from this year's True Believers

Moonframe is a slice of near future sci-fi that comes courtesy of newcomers Nick Bryan and artist Lucas Peverill. Harriet is a scientist who invents a new online back up system which involves computers made of brain tissue, that are backing up our internet history on the moon. When the tissue gets infected with a disease, Harriet is punished by her boss and her husband is sent to the moon to fix it. Which begins your typical man in space, in peril story as the moon frame starts fighting back and Harriet and her hubby must stop it. Moonframe is one of those books that is built around an amazing central concept. Bryan has clearly had a moment of inspiration here and the mix of organic and machine make for a really interesting and sinister concept. As does the fantastic juxtaposition of a moon based repair man and his earth based manager. While the ideas behind the story are solid, the actual execution isn't quite there and it could do with a bit of clarity on the art to make the story into something really special.

Pick up Moon Frame from Nick Bryan's online store

The latest from the brilliant John Tucker, **Plan A/Plan B** is as much an exercise in story telling and printing logistics as it is comic creation. The book comprises two stories which each build to a single point in time, represented by a common image in the middle of the comic. Each story is then told in different halves of the book – meaning you read Plan A first, then flip the book over to read Plan B - or vice versa. It's another delightfully daft story from Tucker, with his usual quirky ideas and hilarious visuals. While it is perhaps not the most gripping or deep story, the highly original presentation of the book make it a must read.

Purchase Plan A/Plan B from John's online store

Having launched **Awesome Comics** #1 at last years True Believers, the Awesome Comic Podcast crew have brought their respective stories to blood-soaked, engine-revving and cockney-kicking conclusions in this final issue. This four issue series has been lots of fun, with three very enjoyable and outlandish stories that perfectly matches the personalities of the three podcast hosts. If you've not been reading it from the start, Murder Road is a slice of Stephen King-inspired 80s road movie horror and is packed full of blood guts and evil motor cars. While Cockney Kung fu sees east end bad girl Red drawn into the seedy underbelly of 60s London in a foul mouthed, fist flying adventure with art from Nick Prolix whose work is probably the stand out for the series (especially his hand drawn lettering!). And finally Vyper channels the best of 80s TV series like Streethawk and Airwolf but mixes them up with a R-Rated level of violence to make a really fun pastiche of 80s action movies. It's silly, daft fun and if you enjoy the Awesome Comic Podcast you will love this fantastic series. **Pick up Awesome Comics #1-4 from awesomecomicpod.bigcartel.com**

When not providing the artwork for award winning Red Rocket Comet, Grayham Puttock is the man behind the sinister soap opera known as **Circusside**. (Another book we discovered for the first time at last year's True Believers). Although nominally based around a circus called Queequgs and it's motley roster of misfits (including a mute clown), it is the oddball cast of the local town who are the true focus of the story. From a chainsaw wielding skinhead, to ambitious property developers to a council worker who was caught up in a hit and run at the end of issue 2 and is now dealing with consequences. Circusside is one of those books that really defies pigeon-holing – it's part crime drama, part small town kitchen sink soap opera, and after this issue, there is also a strange supernatural element involving a woodland witch. It's an ambitious and intricate story all brought to life by Grayham's incredible photo realistic pencil artwork. Circusside is one of those delightful curiosities of the small press scene and one which we are always intrigued to see how it develops.

Pick up Circusside #1-3 for £5 each from www.graymanputtockart.com

Produced in association with Pipedream Comics
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Steve Parkhouse

Remembering Stars Fell on Stockbridge

...AND A MIRACLE HAS HAPPENED, MY FRIEND! I WAS ABOUT TO CROSS LANCES WITH SIR HECTOR OF RICHMOND ... WHEN OF A SUDDEN I FOUND MYSELF IN ANOTHER TIME ... ANOTHER WORLD!
IS THAT NOT MIRACULOUS?

The Peter Davison years were a golden era for Marvel UK's *Doctor Who* comic strip. The first Davison strip, 'The Tides of Time' (January to July 1982), was a classic story, written by Steve Parkhouse and drawn by Dave Gibbons, which remains highly regarded today. The plot of this memorable tale concerns a vast bio-mechanical complex known as the 'Event Synthesizer'. Similar in structure to a church organ, the huge device is controlled by the Prime Mover, an enigmatic character who uses the Synthesizer to produce the ordered vibrations of the cosmos' and regulate the flow of events in time. But all is not well when 'for the first time in centuries, a note of discord was struck.' The Time Lords charge the Doctor with the task of restoring the Synthesizer and he is accompanied on his quest by a likeable and charismatic Medieval knight called Sir Justin.

The following story is the main focus of my column this month - 'Stars Fell on Stockbridge' (September to October 1982). A modest two episodes in length, it was nonetheless arguably one of the most memorable Doctor Who comic strips ever written and introduced one of the strip's most fondly remembered supporting characters in the form of Maxwell Edison. Written and drawn once again by Steve Parkhouse and Dave Gibbons respectively, the story was edited by Alan McKenzie who oversaw all the original run of Davison strips.

The story opens in the Gloucestershire village of Stockbridge (featured in the previous story but only now given a name) where local UFO spotter Maxwell Edison observes an object fall from Earth orbit into the local Well's Wood. Looking somewhat like a cross between Frank Spencer and Benny Hill, Max believes that he holds 'a key position in the cosmic scheme of things' and is known as 'Mad Max' by the locals.

Rushing to find the fallen celestial object, Max finds himself stumbling into the Fifth Doctor's TARDIS. The Doctor is somewhat bemused by his new companion, who claims to possess some form of telepathic energy, but is impressed when Max's assertion that he has detected an object in Earth orbit proves to be correct. The two travel to a giant derelict spaceship where Max detects a presence aching with loneliness. The presence is ultimately revealed to be... well, I'm not going to tell you because that would spoil it and this really is a story worth checking out if you haven't read it already. What I will say, by way of a clue, is that the storyline remains very relevant to the modern age, especially given that artificial intelligence is very much a topical subject. There isn't a 'villain' or 'monster' as such in this adventure – the threat comes in a form that is much more subtle and abstract.

What makes this a special story? Well, firstly Max is a likable supporting character who appeals to the 'inner geek' which exists in many of us. He's an enthusiast, a trainspotting type, who means well but is underestimated and seen as eccentric by the locals. But he proves to be a reliable temporary companion for the Doctor and wins a personal moral victory at the story's

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'Max is a likable supporting character who appeals to the 'inner geek'

conclusion. "Never underestimate the underdog" is arguably one of the key themes of the story (although see Steve Parkhouse's comments on this below). Then there's the Doctor himself, brilliantly written by Steve with dialogue that is remarkably spot-on given that he had not been able to see the Fifth Doctor on television when he started writing for the character. Finally, there is Dave Gibbons' perky, moody artwork. No-one does gloomy spaceship interiors better than Gibbons and the reader is left with mental images of the ship which are as vivid as if they had seen them on television. Gibbons knows how to layout a comic page like nobody else and here he experiments with different sized frames and uses light and dark to brilliant effect. This, sadly, was to be his final regular Doctor Who work.

The village of Stockbridge returned in the following story, 'The Stockbridge Horror' (Dec 2008 to Feb 2009), and was later featured in stories featuring the Eighth, Tenth and Twelfth Doctors, most recently 'The Stockbridge Showdown' (July 2016) a celebratory story for DWM's 500th issue which saw the return of all the main companions originated in the comic strip including Maxwell Edison. In all, the Davison comic strip era comprised of six stories, the final one being 'The Moderator' (Jan to April 1984) which concluded in issue 87, following which the Colin Baker era began in earnest.

So now, let's catch up with the man behind Stars Fell on Stockbridge. Steve Parkhouse is a legendary comics writer, artist and letterer. As well as writing for Doctors Four, Five and Six for Doctor Who Magazine, he has contributed to Hulk Comic, 2000AD, the British comics anthology Warrior and the Dark Horse comic Resident Alien. Here, he gives us his thoughts on Stars Fell on Stockbridge...

Hi, Steve. I think you captured the Fifth Doctor's character brilliantly in the strips that you wrote. How much information about the character were you given? Had you seen any of Peter Davison's episodes when you started writing?

Okay, I'm kicking off with something controversial. From my perspective, the Doctor's character doesn't actually change with each incarnation. He remains the Englishman abroad in all his different guises, so writing the Fifth Doctor was no different from the Fourth. I just kept the English eccentric facade intact, which was reinforced by the publicity stills that I'd been sent. In those photographs, we had a young English dude, dressed in blazer and flannels, (presumably with a public school accent) and a cricket bat! The choice had already been made. This was before any of the episodes had been aired... but I had a fairly good idea of where it was going.

You used the Doctor's connection to cricket very effectively – more so than the TV show did, I feel. Did you expect the cricketing connection to be developed more by the show than it ultimately was?

Not really. It would be difficult to envisage how the cricket connection could be played on TV. As far as I was concerned it was a prop for the reader/viewer to make an association. When we think of cricket we think of summer, we think of a certain genteel atmosphere, we might be reminded of the parochialism of the village green and parish council meetings etc. At least, those are the associations for me. That was the backdrop I wanted to create, as a complete and total contrast to the bizarre, multidimensional events that were happening in the narrative. It's a well-worn technique, and I think it mirrors our broader reality. The Doctor is an alien, after all... and yet he masquerades as a crazy Brit. I'm doing the same - aren't you?

I loved the way that Sir Justin seemed to accept the technology of the TARDIS more than a contemporary person might. Would you like to have used the character for longer?

What Sir Justin was prepared to accept was not the technology of the TARDIS, but his own perception of what constitutes magic. I forget who said it, so I'll paraphrase: "the technology of the future will seem like magic." [I think Steve is thinking of Arthur C Clarke - Ed.] Sir Justin represented something that was once a bulwark of the human spirit, namely, faith. In my

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THEN, FULLY MATERIALISED, THE TARDIS SEEMED TO SINK INTO THE SILENT SHADOWS... ENVELOPED IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF BROODING MENACE...

experience a sense of wonder invokes a deeper level of consciousness and an expanding sense of mystery. This can make some people feel "insignificant", which to me doesn't make sense. For someone like Sir Justin it promoted his faith in the Almighty. The Doctor would probably translate that as an intuitive response to an intelligent, sentient universe. So, for the purposes of the story, they were two sides of the same coin. I had no intention or desire to use him for longer because he served his purpose and then moved on into a kind of afterlife - in his terms the world of spirit, I guess. Anyhow, the image of his memorial tomb seemed like an appropriate ending.

Turning to Stars Fell on Stockbridge, Maxwell seems to share a lot of the traits of Doctor Who fans or train spotters or other enthusiasts. Was he based on anyone in particular?

Yes, he was. He was based on a real person I had met through certain circles that I was moving in at the time. He was a photographer who invented all kinds of weird contraptions in his spare time. Another kind of Englishman: the amateur inventor. His essential quality was harmlessness. While he's busy spotting UFOs or inventing a better mousetrap, he can't be invading Poland or executing dissidents. But bear in mind his name was Maxwell Edison, from the Beatles song Maxwell's Silver Hammer - a song about a serial killer!! That was my attempt at irony.

'Stars' is quite a small, self-contained story. Max and the Doctor are the only main characters and there's an unseen (at first) threat rather than a villain. The story before it, Tides of Time was much bigger in scale, with universal consequences. Which type of story do you prefer writing?

It's often not a question of preference. The creative process is not a predictable phenomenon. I've never been able to say, "I think I'll write a story with universal consequences today." When the spark happens, you just allow it to take its own course and see what ignites. I've always managed to put my rational mind on hold while a story is unfolding, then I try to edit the subsequent chaos into some kind of coherence. It's the shape a story makes that's important to me. As long as the overall shape has a basic structure, you can

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> "***Stars*** is quite a small, self contained story. Max and the Doctor are the only main characters"

hang different elements from it, like ornaments on a Christmas tree! Writing a big story can be exhilarating at first, but it becomes more stressful in later stages when faced with the challenge of tying it up. Shorter stories can often spark off in your mind like a firework and appear complete. But that's rare.

It's nice to see Max, a classic underdog figure, gain some credit and respect at the end of the story. Did you set out to 'champion the underdog' or was that something which just evolved naturally from the story?

I didn't set out to consciously champion the underdog. I wanted to create a character who was utterly unprepossessing. Even now he's a difficult character to summarise. I've always been fascinated by the idea of heroic actions being performed by unheroic people. We do it ourselves, and I've written about this before. We all perform small acts of heroism every day. Archetypal heroes tend to be over-simplistic in their response to fear. The classic superhero, for instance, knows no fear. That's not heroic. A true hero experiences mortal dread but overcomes it with some higher motivation. I'd like to think there's a little element of Max in everybody. He struggles, he fails, then he finds his courage and self-belief from some mysterious source. Initially I was irritated by the Maxwell character. In real life he was often an unwelcome visitor, obsessive and socially inept. Then it began to occur to me that he was quite a familiar stereotype. A borderline genius with idiotic tendencies. I had to dig deep to find some sympathy for him, maybe because he reminded me of my own frailties. So, I decided to give him superpowers and see what happened.

This was a parallel to those amateur inventors who rescue entire nations from their fate during wartime. Often regarded as cranks, they overcome their personal shortcomings in sometimes magnificent ways.

Do you think giving the Doctor a semi-permanent 'home' such as Stockbridge would have worked well on TV?

Maybe. It may have been a useful base for the TV character in terms of saving effort and expense. It could be inferred that the village itself was a magnet that attracted strange happenings; shifts in time and space etc. Somewhere in my murky subconscious I had envisaged the Doctor arriving in Stockbridge for some ulterior purpose which was never divulged. Then he was overtaken by events, thereby demonstrating that even a Time Lord has no real control, even in a seemingly ordinary, stable environment like an unremarkable English village. Again, it could be seen as metaphorical; how we disregard the miraculous when it becomes everyday reality.

Which of your Doctor Who comic stories do you think would work best on TV?

None of them. Here's another controversial opinion. I don't consider television to be a visual medium. It's a great storytelling medium and presents actors with wonderful opportunities to demonstrate their craft; but it's not necessarily dependent on imagery. I had the advantage over TV inasmuch as I could expand the narratives into the further reaches in a series of epic images and still not incur massive production costs. It was my intention from the outset to completely ignore the TV series and go for broke. And I have to say that all the artists who collaborated with me responded in a heroic manner - God bless them all.

With thanks to Steve Parkhouse. Artwork by Dave Gibbons © Doctor Who Magazine/Panini. Stars Fell on Stockbridge is available as part of the Doctor Who: The Tides of Time Graphic novel from Panini Books.

Author: Ian Wheeler | **Twitter:** @ianwheeler_who

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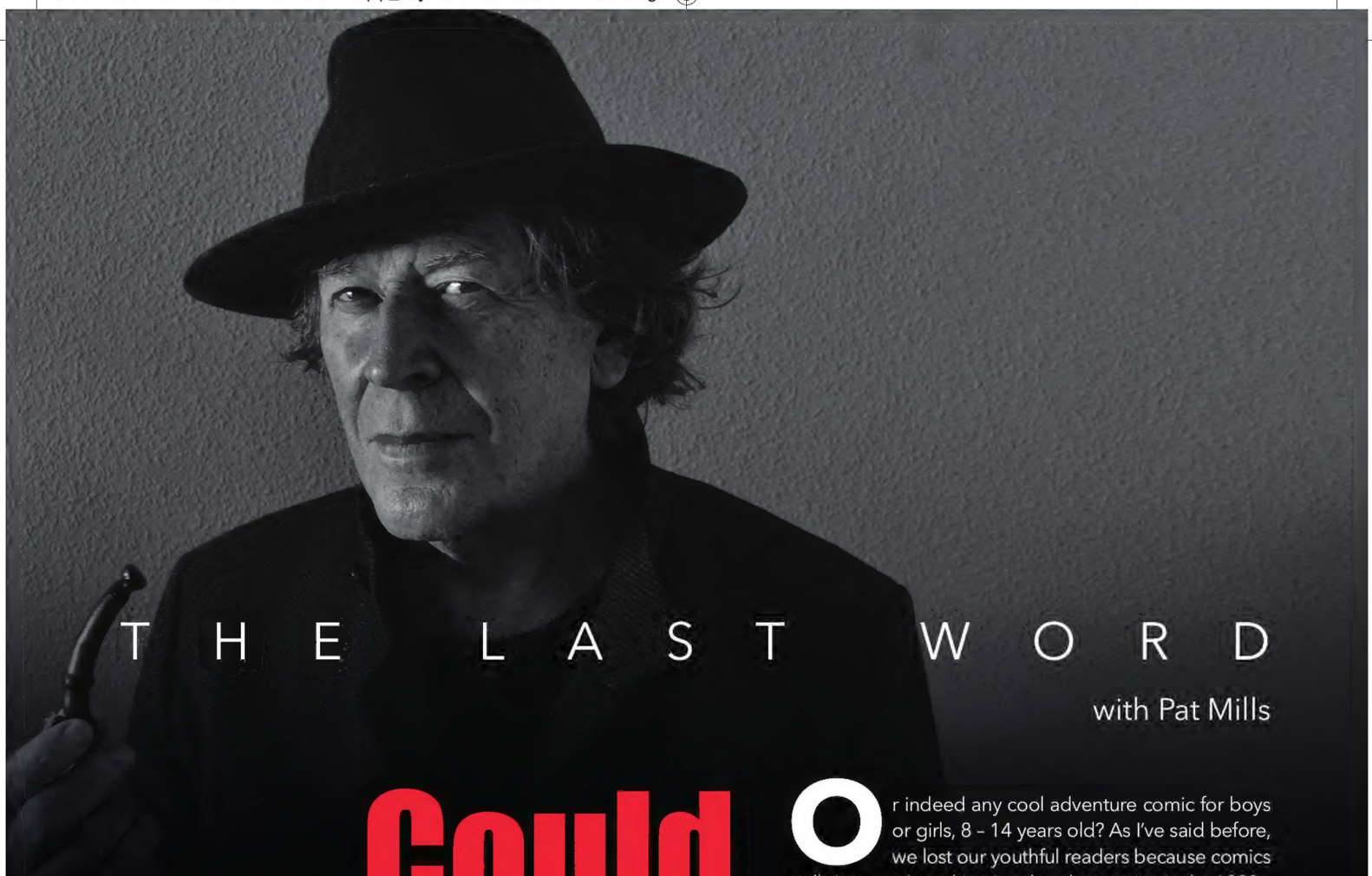

THE LAST WORD

with Pat Mills

Could there be another 2000AD today?

Or indeed any cool adventure comic for boys or girls, 8 – 14 years old? As I've said before, we lost our youthful readers because comics sadly 'grew up', resulting in sales plummeting in the 1990s. Editors and creators preferred American comics like Vertigo, graphic novels and the (supposed) prestige of working for older readers. Whilst great comic artists' work is generally accessible for all ages, the same cannot always be said for great comic writers and for editors. Also – and this is the real gorilla in the corner – producing the right stories for the younger market was/is actually too hard for many comic editors. They don't actually know how to do it. Even though the principle is deceptively simple : you give the readers what they want, not what you want. The hard part is keeping the story and art powerful, understandable, original and never settling for second best. And strictly adhering to story principles which don't always matter to older readers or to elitist fans. (E.G. Pro-active cool heroes, strong villains, conflict, action, minimal talking heads and dangerous, risky scenes they can't see in movies.) I've seen the disdain on the faces of comic professionals when I've recently talked enthusiastically about writing again for 'downmarket' comics aimed at such kids. Could we get such readers back? Yes, but no one wants to. Instead, some professionals prefer to say the loss of kids' comics is down to changing demographics and videos games which is patently untrue. So they will ignore or explain away why Commando comics still sell well, because they haven't outgrown their readers. (I regularly read such picture libraries as a young kid; usually on the newsstand counter so I didn't have to pay for them.) And why French comics are still read by all generations of readers. France, incidentally, is the biggest comic market in the world after Japan. (America is number three.)

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THE CURSED EARTH
CHAPTER 16
BLACK SABBATH!
JUDGE DREDD
THE DEVIL BEAST TRIUMPHS
SATANUS CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE CHURCH. HIS NEEDS WERE SATISFIED NOW. HE WAS ONLY EATING BECAUSE IT WAS THERE AND — HE DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE ANY OF THE GOODNESS!
2000AD Credit Card:
COMPU-73

Just a few days ago, I watched a video clip of a young lad, Theo, being interviewed by his dad, Chris, about Judge Dredd the Cursed Earth which he was avidly reading. He particularly liked the alien Tweak because he was clever yet pretended to be stupid. And Satanus because he was such a monster. My retweet of the video got 187 likes, 23 retweets and 70,600 impressions.

Here's Chris's comments on the subject: 'It's been a real struggle finding actual comics, rather than free gift bagged toy franchise promos, for my kids growing up. There's Phoenix and the Beano, both of which are great, but slim pickings for those of us who grew up with dozens of titles every single week! So now he's taken to exploring vintage 2000AD, it's a bit of a boon. It's astonishing - he's devouring this stuff so quickly, it's properly turning lights on lights in his head and giving him ideas and making him think about stuff. And it's totally age-appropriate, the early stuff! And plenty of his young pals are the same. THE MARKET IS THERE! Sure, they're into video games and YouTube stars and tablets and whatnot, but ultimately they want stories that tickle their imagination. And that can be a film, a book, a TV show... or a comic.'

I think Chris speaks for so many of us. I've seen a similar enthusiastic reaction by girl readers when I straw-polled them with some classic Tammy and Misty stories. But, unlike some of my peers, I can't shrug my shoulders and say 'so what'? And so my fictional history of comics in my Read em and Weep series of novels continues. I featured a fictional Battle, Blitzkrieg, in Book One Serial Killer. Aaaagh!, a fictional Action in Book Two: Goodnight John Boy. I'm now about to move onto writing Book Three featuring a fictional counterpart to 2000AD called Space Warp. I've planned out about twelve comic serials so far and will script some of them and probably get them drawn over time. These include Future Schlock... The Jurassic Man - a dinosaur story very different to Flesh...and Agent Impossible - a very special secret agent but with a different angle to Mach One.

Schlock is a mysterious alien robot and editor of Space Warp and introduces the Future Schlock science fiction self-contained stories; each one of which has a very schlock ending, but is still age appropriate for kids. Just about. Similar to the original 2000AD which was always on the edge. And that is how comics should be - risky, edgy, dangerous - unless we want them to be completely taken over by the middle classes which will surely be their final death knell.

A collective of French comic artists are huge fans of British comic writers and artists. They got in touch with me recently and they liked the idea of Schlock a lot. So they are featuring a Future Schlock in their crowd-funded book magazine Gryyym (200 pages). There will be paper and digital editions in French and English. Their campaign begins in March on Facebook and other social media. The style of Gryyym is very Metal Hurlant, the French magazine which inspired my original 2000AD, so we've kind of gone full circle. Other Schlock stories have been earmarked for some excellent British artists.

So could there be another 2000AD today? Yes. And I'm writing it Even if it remains in the pages of my text novel. I wish it could have been in comic form, but the archaic 20th century publisher system of buying all rights - another crucial factor in the death of kids comics - sadly persists to this day. I wanted to do Space Warp to prove it's still possible to come up with exciting serials today that are 'the same but different' to the original 2000AD. And because I believe, like Chris, the kids are still out there; it's the professionals who went away.

Perhaps if there's enough Space Warp stories illustrated, we might even end up, eventually, with a Space Warp annual, but only if the art standard is high. (Needless to say, in my publishing world artists retain the copyright on their art.) Because I know just how critical kids are and I still won't settle for second best.

The standard on Prog One of 2000AD was awesome and, I'm sure you'll agree, young readers today, like Theo, deserve no less.

Author: Pat Mills | **Twitter:** @PatMillsComics | **Website:** millsverse.com.
Tweet us your thoughts @comicsflixukus #comicscene #tlw

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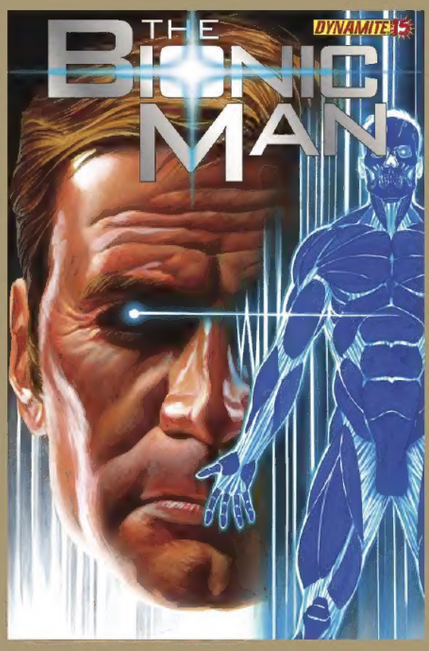
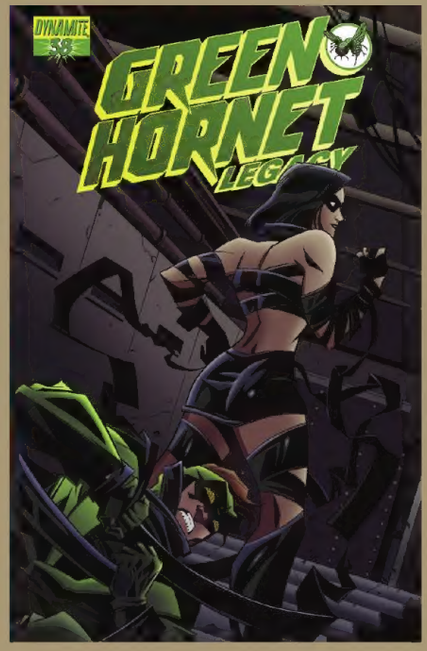


SAMURAI SLASHER PART II
GARLEY - SIMMONDS - WINGAARD - TORMEY - ROOKE
R.H.STEWART - W.CLIFT - IMBER - STOTT - SHERWELL - STOCK
B.COOPER - SCRIVENS - LEE-GRAHAM - HARROWER - BEATTIE - HUNT



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